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FAME & FORTUNE

Stories of **WEEKLY** BOYS who make MONEY.

• A FREAK OF FORTUNE; •

OR, THE BOY WHO STRUCK LUCK.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Throwing the axe aside, Dick seized the barrel and tried to dislodge it from its hiding-place. "Gee whiz!" exclaimed Casperfield. "It's chock full of money." Such was the fact, and Bonnie Barton uttered a little shriek of delight.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A FREAK OF FORTUNE

OR,

THE BOY WHO STRUCK LUCK

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK SLOOP.

"Is supper ready, mother? I'm as hungry as a hunter," cried Dick Leslie, bustling into a modest-looking cottage on the suburbs of a good-sized and wide-awake village in the Golden West, hanging his cap on a convenient hook and grabbing the little, sad-faced woman, who welcomed him with a sweet smile, around the waist, gave her a hearty hug and kiss.

"Yes, Dick, ready and waiting. Did you see your father anywhere in the village?" asked his mother, with an anxious expression.

"No, mother," replied the boy, with a frown. "I haven't seen Mr. Brand since morning."

Dick never called his mother's second husband father. And for good reason.

Mr. Brand was not a man who appealed to his love and respect in any way.

He was an idle, good-for-nothing individual, with a surly disposition, and a deep-seated grouch against the world in general, and his step-son in particular.

He hated the world because everybody seemed to be more prosperous than himself—a fact not much to be wondered at considering how he conducted himself.

He disliked Dick Leslie because the sturdy, good-looking and intelligent boy wasn't his own flesh and blood, and continually reminded him of a better man than himself.

Dick practically supported his mother and stepfather

with the small wages he received as clerk in the principal general store of the village.

He wouldn't have been able to do this but for the fact that his mother owned the little cottage and the acre of land surrounding it.

A bone of contention between Mr. Brand and his wife was her persistent refusal to mortgage this small property so that her husband could go into some easy business that suited his tastes.

Had his intentions to try and support the family been honest, it is not unlikely that his wife might have yielded to his solicitations; but she had good reason for distrusting his promises to reform.

Probably the real cause for Mr. Brand being down on his stepson was the fact that Dick had long since refused to turn his wages over to him as master of the house.

Had the boy done so most of it would have gone into the till of Smith, the tavern-keeper, and the little family would have fared poorly, indeed—not that they lived any too sumptuously as it was, Mrs. Brand having a continual struggle to make ends meet.

Once on a time George Brand had been a fairly industrious mechanic—that was when he paid court to, and finally married, the pretty young widow of Jack Leslie, an enterprising carpenter and builder, who had come to an untimely death through a fall from a house he was building in the village.

Brand, being naturally shiftless, was easily led from the path of industry by the specious arguments of a demagogue who drifted into the village, took up his temporary residence at Smith's tavern, and put in a large part of his

time expounding his theories based on the inequalities of life, and the unfair, as he termed it, distribution of wealth and labor.

His oratory made such an impression on Mr. Brand that he gradually shirked his daily toil and soon became a regular visitor at the tavern, often remaining there until the place was closed at eleven at night.

Of course, as soon as Mr. Brand ceased to work, money ceased to flow in his direction, and the result was that Dick Leslie had to finish his schooling in a hurry and take advantage of a situation offered him by Mr. Simpson, who ran the general store.

Dick had now been working a year at the store, and his employer often declared that the lad was so smart and honest that he wouldn't lose him for a farm.

"He hasn't been home all day," said Mrs. Brand, in answer to her son's reply.

"That isn't anything unusual, is it?" answered Dick, as he took his seat at the table and began to eat.

"No," she replied, mournfully.

"I'll bet I could find him at the tavern if I went there," went on Dick. "He drinks up all he earns, when he feels disposed to work, and every cent you can make you give up."

"He gets very little from me," replied his mother. "I can't spare any money. I am trying to save a bit now to meet the tax bill, which is overdue."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," said Dick, indignantly; "but I'm afraid there is no shame in him."

Mrs. Brand sighed as she poured out a cup of tea for herself.

"I never mean to drink a glass of spirits as long as I live, mother," said Dick, resolutely.

"I hope you never will, my son," replied Mrs. Brand, with solemn earnestness. "It is a terrible curse and misfortune to any one who yields to the temptations of the liquor habit. Its victims fill the poorhouses of the country and paupers' graves. It leads to crime and a cell in the penitentiary, and often to the hangman's noose. It is responsible for more real distress than anything else I know of in the world. Had my first husband, your father, lived, things would have been very different with us. He never drank anything stronger than an occasional mug of cider, and he was an industrious, home-loving man. I am sure you take after him, Dick, and it is a great comfort to me that you do. It would break my heart if you were anything like Mr. Brand."

"Don't fear, mother, it isn't in me to imitate my stepfather. It is my great ambition to succeed in life, and no boy can do that unless he is willing to put his shoulder to the wheel and hustle. The older I grow the more I hope to do for you. If Mr. Brand won't support you, I will. As long as I can peg away you shall not be in danger of actual want. It is lucky you own this house. We have no landlord to hold a club over our heads."

"It is a great blessing," replied his mother. "Your poor father provided well for us during the few years he was permitted to do so. I have been greatly deceived in Mr. Brand, but as we make our beds we must lie on them," she concluded, in a resigned tone.

"Never mind, mother, there are better times in store for

you. I will soon be a man, and able to earn a man's wages, and then you will fare better."

Dick, having finished his supper, got up from the table. "I'm going over to the Casperfield farm to see Joe, mother," said Dick, reaching for his cap.

"Very well, my son. You won't be away late, will you?"

"Of course not, for I've got to get up early in order to be at the store on time."

Thus speaking, Dick passed out of the house and took the road that led away from the village.

After walking a quarter of a mile he turned into a lane that took him close to the head of the creek connecting with Silver Lake, a large and beautiful body of water on which Haywoods Village was situated.

The long summer day was just drawing to its close, but it was still quite light, and Dick expected to reach the Casperfield farm before dusk had given away to night.

This was Thursday, the day on which Dick left the store early, that is, five o'clock—on other days he worked till eight.

The head of the creek was a lonesome, marshy spot, plentifully wooded, and was seldom visited by any one.

The only reason that Dick went that way was because it was a short cut from the road to the Casperfield farmhouse, consequently he and his friend Joe were accustomed to pass the spot quite often.

As Dick approached the upper section of the creek on this occasion he was surprised to see, through an opening in the trees, the mast and halliards of a small sailing craft.

She was evidently moored as high up as she could go, and in a position where she was not likely to attract observation.

Dick thought it was a strange place for a boat to be, and, his curiosity being excited, he left the beaten path and walked over to the trees to take a look at her.

Making his way through the bushes, he at length came out into an open spot close to where the vessel was secured to the stump of a dead tree, near the stream.

Dick was something of a fresh-water sailor in a general way—that is, he could handle small sailboats with considerable skill, having passed a good deal of his time on the lake until he went to work at Mr. Simpson's store.

It is not strange, therefore, that he had a strong interest in everything connected with the water.

The craft in question was sloop rigged, and was painted a dead black, that time and the weather had somewhat rusted.

Her mainsail, which hung loose about the boom, just as it had been lowered, and her jib, lying in a heap on the short bowsprit, were old and dirty.

There was a small main hatch, which was covered, and a scuttle forward, between which it and the bowsprit projected a stovepipe that indicated the presence of a sort of galley under the deck.

She was steered by an ordinary tiller, the wood of which was polished from constant handling.

Her head was pointed down stream, and the narrowness of the little waterway at this point showed that she had been pulled up some distance by the stern.

Dick, as he viewed her critically, fore and aft, could not but wonder why she had been brought up to such a dreary and unfrequented spot.

"I'll give something to learn why she is lying away up here," he said to himself. "I can't see any sense in it. I wonder if there's anybody aboard of her," he added, looking at the sliding door of her trunk cabin, which stood wide open.

Not a sound came from her.

To all appearances she was deserted.

Dick had half a mind to step aboard and look into her cabin, but considering that he had no right to do this he was turning away to resume his walk when a hand was roughly laid on his shoulder from behind and a voice that was familiar to him grated on his ear:

"What in thunder are you spying around here for?"

He wheeled around and faced the scowling face of—his stepfather.

CHAPTER II.

THE RED-HEADED MAN.

Dick was astonished to see Mr. Brand in this out-of-the-way place.

When he wasn't doing an odd job to raise a little money he was hanging around the tavern.

At any rate he wasn't in the habit of wandering out of the village.

"You here, Mr. Brand?" Dick ejaculated.

"Yes, I'm here," growled his stepfather. "What brings you here? Why ain't you at the store?"

"I'm always off Thursdays at five."

"Then why ain't you home?"

"I was home for supper. I'm now on my way to the Casperfield farm."

"Oh, you are?" replied his father, looking at him suspiciously. "What's taking you there I'd like to know?"

"I'm going to call on my friend Joe."

"I reckon there's a lane leading from the road, quarter of a mile further on, that goes to the farm. Why didn't you take it if you're going there?"

"Because this way is shorter."

"Thinking of crossing the marsh, I suppose?" said Mr. Brand, with an ugly grin.

"Of course not. The marsh isn't passable on foot."

"I know it isn't."

"Then why did you ask me such a foolish question?"

"Just to see how much of a liar you are."

"You've never known me to lie yet, Mr. Brand," replied Dick, indignantly.

"You're lying when you say you came to this creek because it's a short road to the Casperfield farm. You couldn't follow this creek no further than a dozen feet, and you know it as well as I do."

"I didn't expect to follow the creek. There's a path on the other side of these trees. I was walking along that."

"Why didn't you stick to it, then? What brought you here, butting into what doesn't concern you?"

"I happened to see the mast and rigging of this sloop through the trees, and thinking it a queer place for a vessel to be I came over to take a look at her."

"Well, you haven't any business to come over and look at her," snarled Mr. Brand.

"Why not?" asked Dick, in a surprised tone. "What difference does it make?"

"It makes a lot of difference."

"Do you know anything about this sloop?"

"None of your business whether I do or not," replied Mr. Brand, angrily.

"All right," answered Dick, disgusted with his stepfather's surliness. "I won't bother you any more. I'm going on to the farm."

At this moment a shock of red hair, a smoothly shaven, tough-looking countenance, and a pair of ox-like shoulders, rose out of the companionway opening to the cabin of the sloop, and a coarse voice demanded to know who were there.

"It's me and that young monkey of a stepson of mine," replied Mr. Brand, in reply to the hail.

Apparently, Dick's stepfather was acquainted with the man on the sloop.

"What's he doin' here, Brand?" said the red-headed individual in no pleasant way. "I thought you knew better than to bring him along."

"I didn't bring him. I found him here."

"You found him here, eh? Then he was spyin' around. Tryin' to find out somethin', so he could carry tales."

"I don't know what he was doing. All I know is he hasn't any business here, and I was just pulling him over the coals for coming."

The red-headed man extricated the rest of his husky body from the stairway and sprang ashore, with a scowl on his face.

Three strides carried him to where Dick was talking to his stepfather.

"Look here, young feller, what brought yer nosin' around these diggin's?" he asked, sharply.

"What do you mean by nosing around? I didn't go aboard your vessel," returned Dick, a bit aggressively.

"What did yer come here for, anyway?"

"To see what kind of a vessel was moored so far up the creek. I never saw one up this way before."

"Oh, yer didn't? What business is it of yours whether a vessel is anchored up this way or not?"

"It isn't any of my business."

"But yer made it yer business to try and find out what she was doin' here, didn't yer?"

"No, I didn't. I was just looking her over out of curiosity."

"So yer'd know her ag'in if yer saw her, eh?"

"I didn't think about such a thing."

"Did anybody tell yer this sloop was anchored here?"

"No."

"Then what's yer reason for comin' over to the creek?"

Dick repeated to him the same explanation of his presence in that locality that he had given his stepfather.

He couldn't help beginning to suspect that there must be something wrong with the sloop because of the persistent questioning on the part of both Mr. Brand and the red-headed man, who were certainly acquainted with each other.

They both appeared to resent his intrusion on the spot, though Dick couldn't see what difference it made at all.

The red-headed man listened to his statement with evident disbelief.

"Yer think yer kin hoodwink me, do yer? Well, I'm

too old a bird to be caught with chaff. I've cut my eye teeth long ago, afore you were born."

"Don't you believe what I say?"

"No, I don't."

"All right," replied Dick, indifferently. "Have it your own way."

Having no further interest in remaining on the spot, he started to walk away.

"Hold hard, young feller, yer ain't goin' off in such an all-fired hurry as that!" cried the red-headed man, reaching out and grabbing him by the arm.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Dick, trying to shake himself free.

"Don't yer worry about me. Where was yer goin' in such a rush?"

"I was going about my business. Take your hand off my arm."

"Jest hear the young bantam crow!" sneered the tough-looking man. "Do yer allow him to talk back to yer in that way at the house, Brand?" he added, looking at Dick's stepfather, mockingly.

Mr. Brand scowled, but made no reply.

"Are you going to let me go?" asked Dick, angrily. "You haven't any right to treat me in this way."

He was too proud to appeal to his stepfather, even if he had had any idea that Mr. Brand might have made any movement in his behalf.

As it was, however, his mother's second husband showed very little disposition to interfere.

"No, I'm not goin' to let yer go till I'm good and ready, see? And I reckon I'll treat yer jest as it suits me."

"Maybe you'll regret handling me in this fashion," retorted Dick. "I haven't interfered with you in any way, but you're treating me in an outrageous manner. I guess there must be something wrong about you and your old sloop or you wouldn't be so inquisitive as to my reasons for being in this neighborhood."

That was an unlucky speech of Dick's.

The man, with a wrathful imprecation, suddenly raised his fist and struck him a heavy blow on the side of the head.

For a moment Dick felt as if the sky had fallen in on him.

He reeled, grasped wildly at the air and fell flat on the ground.

Then his senses fled.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HOLD OF THE BLACK SLOOP.

It was a brutal and cowardly blow, and if Mr. Brand had had a spark of decent feeling in him he would at least have protested against his companion's savage and uncalled-for assault on his stepson.

Mr. Brand, however, did not make the faintest kind of a protest when he saw Dick lying completely knocked out on the earth.

On the contrary, the boy's predicament seemed to afford him a great deal of satisfaction.

Owing Dick as he did a long-standing grudge, which he was unable to wipe out himself, he was glad to see somebody else do him up.

"You hit him a pretty hard wallop, Sykes," chuckled Mr. Brand. "I guess he'll remember that fist of yours for some time to come."

"I reckon he will, Brand. There don't seem to be no love lost between you and him," grinned the red-headed man.

"I should say not. I hate the measley cub. I haven't been able to get him to cough up a cent of his wages since he went to work," remarked Mr. Brand in an injured tone. "My good money helped raise him from a kid, and that's the way he turns on me."

"Ain't you boss of yer own roost?" asked Sykes, with a contemptuous leer.

"Of course I'm the boss," replied Brand, throwing out his chest.

"Then why don't yer take the boy's wages away from him if he won't part with the stuff willin'ly?"

"The old woman would put up a big howl if I did that, as she thinks the sun, moon and stars rise and set in that kid."

"What need you care? If I was in your shoes, and the wife set up her toot I'd give her a tap or two on the jaw, and I'll wager she'd close up as tight as a clam after that. I wouldn't stand no foolin' from any woman. The trouble with you, Brand, yer don't put yer foot down hard enough. Well, what are we goin' to do with this precious stepson of yours? If we let him go he's sure to tell about this sloop bein' moored up here. Then to-morrow mornin', when to-night's work at the bank is discovered, suspicion will at once point in our direction, and we may not be able to get away as easily as we've counted on."

"I don't care what you do with him," answered Brand.

"Then we'd better tie his hands behind his back and keep him a prisoner in the hold till we get ready to shake the sloop for good. Then you kin come back to the village if yer want to with yer share of the plunder, and live like a swell guy. The boy, when he gets back, won't give you away on account of yer connection with the family. If yer was arrested and clapped in jail it would disgrace him and the old woman. So he's safe to keep his jaw closed."

"All right," replied Brand. "We'll tie him and keep him in the hold. He won't learn for sure that we've had anything to do with robbing the Haywoods Bank. If you look after him yourself, that is, take him his grub and such, he needn't know that I'm aboard the sloop at all."

Sykes favored his companion with an unpleasant look, as if he thought that Mr. Brand was taking a selfish interest in his own welfare.

"I reckon we ain't got no time to lose, for the kid will soon get his senses back. Go down into the cabin and yer'll find some pieces of rope in the starboard locker. Fetch it here and I'll truss him up in short order."

Brand hastened aboard the sloop to get the rope.

He had no trouble in finding it; and the senseless boy was soon bound hand and foot.

Then, between them, they lifted Dick and carried him on to the vessel's deck.

Sykes took the cover off the hatchway, jumped into the hold and disappeared.

In a few minutes he came back to the hatch.

"Hand me the kid," he said, holding up his arms to catch the boy.

Mr. Brand raised Dick and lowered him over the combings of the hatch.

The red-headed man received Dick in his muscular grasp, carried him over to where a pile of sacks were bunched in a corner of the hold near the cabin bulkhead, and dropped him on them, as he might have done with a sack of potatoes.

Then he left the hold and replaced the hatch cover, leaving Dick to recover his wits at his leisure and in the dark.

It might have been ten minutes later that the boy came to his senses.

He found himself stretched out on something softer than the ground, and in a place that was evidently enclosed, for there was no sign of the sky, and the atmosphere was close and warm, while he was surrounded by a dense gloom.

"Where am I at now?" he asked himself, as he tried to put out his hands and rise, only to discover that they were bound behind his back. "My gracious!" he ejaculated. "I'm a prisoner! My ankles are tied together also. This is a pleasant predicament, I must say. Mr. Brand seems to be a party to this outrage. He and that red-headed stranger are clearly friends. That chap looks like a jail-bird, to my way of thinking. A pretty associate for my mother's husband. I'll bet the two are up to some piece of rascality, that's why they didn't want me to get away after discovering the presence of the sloop in such an out-of-the-way spot as the head of the creek. I'd give something to learn what their game is and what they intend to do about me."

As Dick didn't enjoy the sensation of having his arms secured in such an awkward way, he naturally tried to see if he couldn't work them loose.

At first his efforts in this direction met with little success, but he was a persevering boy, and after tugging at the rope, and working his wrists around, he finally succeeded in drawing one of his hands out of limbo.

The other hand easily followed and his arms were at liberty.

Then he put his hand in his pocket, got out his jack-knife and severed the cord that held his feet together.

"Free at last!" he exclaimed, with a feeling of great satisfaction. "It makes a fellow feel good to turn a trick on his persecutors. I'm thinking Mr. Brand and his husky associate will have to rise pretty early in the morning in order to get the best of me. Now I guess I'll be able to find out where I am."

He had a small box of matches in his vest-pocket, and striking one of them, the glare gave him a line on his surroundings.

"Why, I'm in the hold of the sloop. I might have guessed that," he cried.

The place was littered with odds and ends of rope, sail-cloth, blocks, old boxes, and other articles thrown around haphazard upon a lot of pig-iron ballast.

"The next thing will be to make my escape from this prison pen, without my stepfather and his rascally companion becoming wise to the fact in time to prevent me. I should like to treat them to a nice little surprise. They'd feel like thirty cents if, when they came down here to look after me, they found that their bird had flown the coop."

Dick chuckled as he imagined their discomfiture.

"However, I mustn't count my chickens before they're hatched," he added. "I'm not out of the place yet. Maybe I won't be able to get out after all."

The cabin bulkhead was right behind him, while another bulkhead forward separated the hold from the galley in the forepeak.

"The only way out I judge is by way of a hatch, the cover of which is on. If it is secured on the outside I am effectually trapped. But as they took the precaution to bind me so carefully, possibly they did not consider it necessary to fasten the hatch. At any rate, I mean to investigate the matter right away. It must be quite dark by this time, which will favor my efforts to get away."

He was about to make a move for freedom when he heard voices in the cabin behind him.

"That must be my respected stepfather and the red-headed man talking together. I wonder if I'm the subject of the conversation? I'd like to hear what they're saying," breathed Dick, with no little curiosity.

He examined the bulkhead until he found a convenient knothole.

Through this he peered and saw Mr. Brand and Sykes sitting on opposite sides of a small table, which stood in the center of the cabin.

Then he placed his ear to the hole and listened attentively.

He had no difficulty in making out all the men said.

"We'll drop down the creek about one o'clock," Sykes was saying. "That will bring us to the wharf I have picked out in about half an hour or so, and we'll be able to reach the rear of the bank by two, when every one in the village is sound asleep. We ought to have a clear field before us. A jimmy will soon let us into the bank buildin', and I'll bet we'll catch the watchman unawares. It will be a small matter to bind and gag him so that he'll be helpless. I've the tools that'll whistle open the safe in short order, and then all we'll have to do is to clean the place out as slick as a whistle. I look on this job as a regular snap for a chap of my experience, and there isn't one chance in a hundred that anybody will be able to trace the matter to us. No one will suspect you, at any rate, unless it might be that stepson of yours, and he won't say a word for the sake of his old woman."

"I guess it wouldn't be good for him to hint his suspicions if he has any," replied Mr. Brand, threateningly. "I've taken all I'm going to from that cub. His mother has spoiled him, and now he's altogether too fresh to suit me. Some day maybe I'll find some good excuse for tanning his hide, and I'll bet he'll remember it as long as he lives."

"You ought to have done that long ago. You've been too easy with the kid."

"Do you think he'll be safe in the hold with the sloop alongside the wharf while we're away on this job?"

"Sure he'll be safe. He's bound fast enough, and with the hatch cover on there isn't any chance at all of his givin' us the slip, or findin' out what we're up to."

"Suppose somebody should go aboard the vessel and look around while we're at the bank?"

"What! at two in the mornin'? Don't you worry. There won't be a soul near that wharf before daylight, and we'll be off down the lake by that time."

The two men continued to talk about their nocturnal enterprise for awhile longer, and then Sykes got up and said he guessed he would start in and cook supper.

He told Brand to take the crockery, knives and forks, and so-forth, out of one of the lockers and set the table, and then he left the cabin and went forward to the forepeak.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW A SAUCEPAN GOT JOE CASPERFIELD IN TROUBLE.

Dick was both astonished and disturbed at what he had heard.

So his stepfather and the red-headed man were going to try and rob the village bank that night.

While he was too well aware that Mr. Brand was a person entitled to very little respect by reason of his shiftless ways and drinking habit, he had never suspected that his morals were so loose that he could be led into actual crime.

The terrible discovery that the man to whom his mother was bound by the sacred tie of wife was on the eve of embarking in a criminal enterprise that would bring him within the shadow of the law and subject him, if caught, to a considerable term in the State prison, fairly staggered Dick.

He felt that the disgrace of it all would almost kill his mother, and he determined that he must try and prevent his stepfather from mixing himself up in the matter.

But how was he to do this?

Mr. Brand had already compromised himself in the eyes of his rascally associate by consenting to help him loot the bank.

Still that, while bad enough, was not as bad as if he actually engaged in the affair.

It was a serious problem to Dick how he was going to interfere in the matter with any degree of success.

"I must get away at once and see Mr. Tweeksbury, the head constable. He's a good friend of mother's, and no doubt he'll be able to figure out some plan to save my stepfather before he has committed himself too far."

Dick struck another match and cautiously looked for the hatch.

As soon as he located it he brought a couple of boxes underneath it so that he could reach it easily.

Before proceeding further he slipped up to the forward bulkhead and listened.

From the sounds that reached his ears he judged that the red-headed man had lighted a fire in the small stove and was preparing the meal.

Satisfied that the rascal was busily employed with his culinary duties, Dick got on the boxes and tried the hatch, with anxious expectation.

If it was fastened down by a heavy weight he could do nothing.

He pressed against the hatch cover, and to his great satisfaction it yielded to his touch and rose upward.

He did not dare lift it more than a couple of inches until he could see whether the deck was deserted.

There were several circumstances against him.

It was a warm, calm night, and though the moon was not up, the sky was so clear and resplendent with stars

that objects of any size were visible for some distance around the spot.

Clearly, he couldn't hope to escape observation if either Mr. Brand or the red-headed man happened to raise his head above the deck the moment he was making his break for freedom, and such a contingency was as likely to happen as not.

"I guess I'd better wait awhile," thought Dick. "No use of spoiling everything by rushing matters. When they start to eat their supper in the cabin will be a good time to make the venture."

So Dick got down from his perch and took up his position at the knothole in the cabin bulkhead.

Mr. Brand had lighted a lantern and hung it from the small skylight over the table.

He had also set the table in a rough way—a plate on either side of the table, with its attendant knife and fork; a cup and saucer flanked by a pewter spoon; a sugar bowl, can of condensed milk, pepper and salt receptacles, and a cruet containing some dark-colored stuff.

A newspaper answered the purpose of a tablecloth.

The odor of steak and fried onions now permeated the hold, and Dick figured that the meal would soon be transferred to the cabin.

He waited impatiently for that moment to come.

The possibility that the red-headed man might take a notion to visit the hold to see that the prisoner was safe before he sat down to eat somewhat disquieted the boy, for in that case the rascal was bound to discover that he was free from his bonds, and what would happen then was not pleasant to think of.

However, he determined not to be subdued again without a stiff fight, and he hoped that he would be able to find something in the hold that would answer for a serviceable weapon.

The clatter in the forepeak continued for awhile longer, and then Sykes made several trips between that spot and the cabin.

Once more Dick placed his eye to the knothole in the cabin bulkhead and saw that the two men were at supper.

"Now is my time to get away," he thought. "If I'm cautious they'll never get on to me."

He moved carefully over to the boxes, mounted them and proceeded to raise the hatch cover.

Then something happened that he had not calculated on.

Sykes had left a small saucepan on the hatch, and as soon as Dick tilted the cover it slid off and rolled along the deck with a lively clatter.

Dick stood for a moment aghast at the disturbance, and then, hearing an exclamation from the red-headed man, together with the sound of a moving stool as the fellow sprang to his feet and rushed up the steps to investigate the cause of the unexpected noise, he dropped the cover back, hastily dismounted from the boxes, which he softly moved aside, and slipped over to the couch of bagging and lay down on it.

He expected nothing else than the immediate lifting of the hatch and the appearance of the hard-looking ruffian in the hold.

Nothing like that happened, but something else did.

When Sykes reached the deck he looked around, with an eye sharpened by experience.

The first thing that caught his glance was the saucepan, bottom side up, on the deck.

He remembered then that he had left it on the hatch.

The next thing he saw was the indistinct figure of a boy in the near distance.

With an exclamation of anger, he jumped to the conclusion that their prisoner had in some unaccountable manner managed to free himself, had slipped out of the hatch, disturbing the saucepan, and was making off as fast as he could.

He shouted down the companionway to Mr. Brand, and clearing the space between the sloop and the shore started in pursuit.

The boy had stopped on hearing the racket, as if surprised at the circumstance, and the red-headed man had no difficulty in coming up with him.

As the woods cast a gloom over the spot where he stood, Sykes did not at once see that this was a different boy altogether.

He concluded that the supposed Dick, perceiving that he would be overtaken, had stopped to put up a fight.

Sykes believed that the first blow counted best, and rushing at the boy hit him a jab in the jaw that sent the astonished young stranger to the ground.

"Yer'll try to get away, eh?" roared the red-headed man, triumphantly. "Thought you'd do the sneak act while we was off our guard. Yer see, it didn't work. That saucepan gave yer away, and now yer'll go back to yer coop ag'in. This time I'll tie yer so tight that yer won't make no second attempt, I'll bet yer."

He seized the dazed lad by the collar of the jacket and hauled him across to the schooner's deck, where Mr. Brand was awaiting the outcome of a situation that he did not quite comprehend.

"Yer precious stepson was givin' us the slip on the quiet, but he didn't get far, all the same," growled Sykes.

Mr. Brand looked down at the prisoner, and then exclaimed:

"Why, this isn't Dick Leslie—it's his friend, Joe Casperfield."

"What!" roared Sykes, looking closer. "It isn't——"

Then he saw that his companion was right.

It wasn't their prisoner, but another boy.

By that time the maltreated lad had recovered his wits and sat up.

"What are you abusing me in this way for?" he demanded, angrily. "Who do you take me for, anyway?"

The two men stared at him without replying.

"I took yer for somebody else," growled Sykes, at length.

"Do you know that you thumped me in the jaw?" said Casperfield, as he got on his feet. "What do you want to hit a fellow my size for, you big coward?"

"Shut up!" snarled Sykes. "I'm in no humor to take any of your sass. Since you ain't the chap I took yer for yer'd better get a move on and clear out."

Joe was about to resent this rough language, for he was a plucky little chap, when he recognized Dick's stepfather, whom he knew well, but did not like.

"Why, is that you, Mr. Brand? Do you know if Dick is at the house? He promised to come over and see me to-night. I got tired of waiting for him and was just going over to your cottage to see why he hasn't shown up."

"No, I don't know nothing about him," answered Mr. Brand, in a sulky tone.

"Then you don't know where he went after supper?" persisted Joe.

"No, I don't."

Joe started to go when it suddenly struck him that this sloop was moored in a strange place.

He stopped and looked her over in a way Sykes didn't like.

"What yer lookin' at?" he demanded, aggressively.

"I'm looking at this sloop. What is she doing so far up the creek?"

"None of yer blamed business what she's doin' here," retorted Sykes. "Git!"

Joe judged from his threatening manner that that was the best thing for him to do, and he was about to step ashore when Dick, who had been attracted underneath the hatch by the conversation he had heard going on, yelled out:

"Hel-lo, Joe! I'm a prisoner in the hold."

The air being so still every word came distinctly to the ears of those on deck.

"Why, that's Dick's voice now!" cried Joe, in great surprise. "He says he's a prisoner in the hold. His voice came right up through the hatch. What's the meaning of this, Mr. Brand?" he concluded, suspiciously.

"Git ashore, will yer?" roared Sykes, grabbing Joe by the arm and trying to force him over the side.

"I won't go ashore till I understand what this means," replied Joe, pluckily.

"Hel-lo, Joe! Hello!" came Dick's voice again.

"Yer won't go, eh?" snarled Sykes, raising his hairy fist.

"Why is Dick shut up in the hold of this sloop, Mr. Brand?" asked Joe, turning to his chum's stepfather. "You just told me that you didn't know anything about him. You'd better let Dick out or I'll see to it that he does get out."

"Yer will, you little monkey!" gritted Sykes. "I've stood all the sass I'm goin' to from yer. If yer'd known when yer was well off yer'd have dusted when I told yer to first. Now yer've got to take the consequences."

"What do you mean?" asked Joe, stepping back.

"I'll show yer what I mean, you measley cub!" answered Sykes, springing on him and bearing him to the deck. "Yer'll go and keep yer friend company in the hold, and see how yer'll like to be shut up there yourself."

Sykes turned Joe over, and placing his knee in the small of his back, snatched up a piece of rope and bound his arms tightly behind him.

"Pull off that hatch, Brand," he said, sharply. "Why don't yer do as I tell yer?" he roared, as Dick's stepfather hesitated.

Mr. Brand obeyed the order, seemingly as if he did not approve of the proceedings, and Sykes lifted Joe up bodily and lowered him down into the hold.

"Now go and find yer side-partner, yer young kangaroo," said the red-headed man, slamming the hatch cover on and then looking around for something to put on top of it as an extra precaution.

He thought of the water-keg in the forepeak, and getting

it placed in where he thought it would do the most good, then he and Brand returned to the cabin to finish their interrupted supper which was rather cold by this time.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE EVE OF A CRIME.

"Hello, Joe!" said Dick, coming up and seizing his chum by the arm, as the hatch cover was replaced by the red-headed man. "I guess I've got you into trouble by yelling out to you. But never mind; we'll get out of this scrape all right before long."

"Why, Dick, how is it that you're a prisoner down here?" asked Joe, facing his friend in the darkness of the hold.

"I'll tell you after I cut you loose," replied Dick, getting out his knife and slashing away at the rope that held Joe's arms together.

In a moment or two Joe was free of his bonds.

Then Dick hurriedly told him how he had got into his unpleasant fix.

"Now wait here till I take a look into the cabin through a knothole. If both Mr. Brand and his companion are in there we'll make an effort to get out, just as I was about to do before you turned up, only I was balked by a saucy rascal that the red-headed ruffian must have left on the hatch. It rolled off with a racket that brought the rascal on deck. Then it seems he caught you thinking it was me making my escape. I'll be back in a moment."

Dick found that his stepfather and Sykes were busily making up for lost time at the table, so he lost no time putting the two boxes into position again, climbing up and shoving at the hatch cover.

This time he was greatly disappointed to find that it resisted his efforts.

"Gee!" he muttered. "They've put a weight on it. I guess Joe and me together can lift it, but it won't do to try, for whatever it is would be sure to make a noise when it slipped off, and then the fat would be in the fire for fair."

So he dismounted and laid the boxes aside again.

"We can't get out for the present, Joe," he said. "There's something on the hatch cover, holding it down. We'll have to wait and trust to luck."

Then he asked his chum to tell him how he happened to run foul of the red-headed man.

"Why, it was this way," explained Joe: "I got tired of waiting for you to show up at the house, as you promised to do, and I was on the way to your home to find out why you hadn't come. As I was passing the corner of the wood I heard a racket in the direction of the head of the creek. It must have been that saucy rascal you say you knocked off the hatch. Then I heard a man's voice shouting out something. As I had no idea that there was anybody, much less a vessel, at this end of the creek, I stopped to listen. Then that big ruffian came rushing toward me. He never said a word but knocked me down with a blow from his heavy fist before I had any suspicion of what was going to happen. Then after saying something about me trying to get away, he dragged me aboard this sloop. I guess you must have heard what followed. He had attacked me by mistake, thinking I was you, but I didn't get on to his blunder, for I was hopping mad. If you hadn't yelled out,

I guess I should have got off all right, but then I wouldn't have known you were a prisoner in this hold."

"To tell the truth, I'm glad you're here, Joe, for we may be able to queer the game my stepfather and the red-headed man are up to."

"What game are they up to?"

"They have planned to rob the Haywoods Bank to-night."

"What!" gasped Joe. "Your stepfather has planned to rob the village bank?"

"No; the other fellow has done the planning, and seems to be a regular crook. I regret to say, though, that he seems to be an acquaintance of Mr. Brand's, and has induced him to go into the scheme. Now, Joe, you won't let that fact get out if we can put a spoke in this affair before my stepfather implicates himself any further in the enterprise, will you?"

"Sure I won't. Did you find out how they're going to work the job?"

Dick told him what little he had overheard about the men's plans.

"How do you expect to choke them off?"

"I don't know just how I'll be able to do it now. If I had got away when I started to leave the hold, I intended to hunt up Mr. Tweksbury and put the matter up to him. He would have found some way of heading off the robbery without arresting Mr. Brand, which he wouldn't like to do for the disgrace it would bring on mother and me. Now I guess we must try and find some way between us."

"I'll do all I can to help you, Dick. You know I'm your friend."

"Yes, I know you are, Joe. That's why I'm going to rely on you to help me save my stepfather from the consequences of his foolish conduct."

"You can rely on me all right."

At that moment the two men, having finished their supper, went on deck, and the boys heard them walking around, overhead.

"Come and sit on the bags and we'll talk it over," said Dick, leading the way. "If that red-headed rascal doesn't take it into his head to come down here and take a look at us we may succeed. As he left me bound hand and foot he no doubt supposes I am still in that shape. And as he dropped you in here, with your arms bound, he won't for a moment imagine that we can free each other. Believing us to be perfectly helpless, he may not bother with us any more to-night. If he doesn't, we'll stand a good show of getting out of our hobble."

It was decided between them that nothing could be done until the sloop dropped down the creek, sailed over to the wharf selected, and the two men had departed on their burglarious errand.

Then as soon as the coast was clear they would break out of the hold, follow their captors to the bank, and try to put a stop to the attempt to loot the institution.

At intervals the boys heard Sykes and Brand pacing the deck, over their heads.

When their footsteps ceased, they knew the men must be seated somewhere, talking.

Thus the evening wore slowly away.

As the hours passed it seemed to grow more hot and oppressive in the hold.

The boys found it more and more of an effort to keep awake.

They yawned and their eyelids grew painfully heavy.

Knowing that to yield to slumber was to endanger their chances of escape at the proper moment, as well as the chances of saving Mr. Brand from the commission of a crime, they fought against the insidious approaches of sleep.

But in spite of their best efforts the silence of the night and the heat of the hold had their natural effect on Dick and Joe, who were accustomed to retiring to their beds at an early hour, as they had to get up early.

They ceased to converse, ceased to punch each other to throw off the drowsy languor that persisted in lulling their senses to repose, and ere long their heads dropped forward on their breasts, and they were soon in sound slumber.

On deck, Sykes and Mr. Brand kept wide awake enough.

They smoked, talked, took frequent drinks from a flask labeled whiskey, and awaited the hour of one, when they proposed to unmoor and start upon their criminal expedition.

There was a small wall clock hanging in the cabin, and Sykes occasionally consulted it.

"Time is up," he said at last, coming on deck after a trip below. "Cast off the moorin' rope from that stump, Brand, while I raise the jib."

Mr. Brand hastened to carry out this direction, and as the sloop moved away from the bank he helped Sykes hoist the mainsail.

The movement of the vessel was rather sluggish, for the wind was not only light but the sails got very little benefit of it till the craft had floated entirely beyond the sheltering line of woods.

It took half an hour for the sloop to traverse the length of the creek, but as soon as she passed out into the lake she found a stronger breeze that carried her along at a more satisfactory rate of speed.

"We're going to have a dark night, after all," remarked Mr. Brand, pointing to the heavy bank of clouds which for more than an hour had been creeping over the sky, blotting out the stars, and changing the early brightness of the night to a gloomy and forbidding aspect.

"So much the better," replied Sykes, who stood at the helm.

The red-headed man had evidently been a sailor at some part of his career, for he acted as if he was thoroughly at home in navigating the craft.

Before the sloop reached the water-front of the village, the heavens were completely overcast, the wind was gradually rising and a drizzling rain was adding discomfort to the scene.

This change in the weather, however, was welcomed by the two men, for it would add to the safety of the enterprise on foot.

Sykes had a sharp eye, and soon singled out the wharf he had selected to moor at while they were away at the bank.

They ran alongside of it and made fast to a spile head.

Not a soul was in sight anywhere, and there seemed little fear that any one would be around that locality until sunrise at least.

"We'll have everythin' our own way, Brand," chuckled the red-headed man. "I'll bet every person in the village

is sound asleep at this hour. The two constables are no doubt snugly stowed away in some comfortable corner out of the wet. At any rate, I'm not afraid of meetin' them, either goin' or comin'. Go down and bring up my kit of tools and the two bags to carry the swag in. As soon as we reach the back door of the bank I'll lend you my gun to intimidate the night watchman with after we break in. Don't forget to put a couple of pieces of rope in your pocket to tie the fellow with, and a bit of rag to gag him."

Mr. Brand brought the required articles on deck, and everything being in readiness, the two men stepped onto the wharf and took their way up the street, hugging the shadows.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK ESCAPES FROM THE HOLD, AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD.

Two hours passed away, during which the two boys in the hold slept as peacefully as though they were in their beds at home.

The precious moments they had counted on for making their escape and carrying out their plans were slipping away while they lay, like a couple of logs, against the side of the sloop.

The light rain had let up, but the wind had risen to a stiffish breeze, which, catching the folds of the mainsail that the men had only partially lowered, caused the sloop to bob uneasily about at her moorings, while the roughening water forced her repeatedly against the spiles with growing roughness.

The sloop's movements, however, appeared to have no effect on the boys, who still slept on in blissful unconsciousness of their surroundings.

Twenty minutes passed, and then a heavier jolt than usual of the sloop against the wharf toppled the sleeping Dick over on his side and awoke him.

He instantly sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hang it, if I haven't been asleep!" he exclaimed, in a tone of disgust. "The question is, how long have I slept?"

At first he thought from the motion of the craft that she was underway, sailing across the lake toward the village wharf.

Then the tug of the sloop at her mooring-line convinced the boy that he was mistaken in his surmise.

The jerky movement of the craft thoroughly surprised him.

When he and Joe fell asleep the sloop was as motionless as if on the stocks, now she was tossing about as if under the influence of a choppy sea.

"The wind must have come up at a lively rate," he thought; "but even so we can't be in the creek. We must be"—the thought startled him—"alongside the wharf in front of the village. If so, my stepfather and his companion may be even now at the bank."

Without paying any attention to the slumbering Joe, he made his way over to the knothole in the cabin bulkhead and peered through.

All was silence and darkness in the cabin.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "They are surely ashore, and Joe and I have lost the golden opportunity we were looking forward to. It isn't too late, however, for us to

get away, I guess. I must make sure just how things stand first, and then I'll arouse Joe."

With some difficulty, owing to the bobbing and rolling of the vessel, he piled the two boxes one on top of the other and mounted to the hatch.

He expected to meet with considerable resistance from the weight on top and therefore exerted considerable force.

To his surprise the cover flew up without any difficulty and he nearly fell off his perch.

Although Dick didn't know it, the action of the sloop had dislodged the water-cask from the top of the hatch.

Grasping the combing of the hatch with one hand, to steady himself, Dick looked around the deck and then the immediate neighborhood.

Being familiar with the entire village water front he knew right away where the sloop was.

"I wonder how long the vessel has been here?" he asked himself. "If not long, Joe and I may have a chance yet to do something. But how are we going to tell how long she's been moored here? I remember now there's a clock in the cabin. I'll go down there and take a look at it. They expected to bring the sloop here about two o'clock. And I suppose they intended to be away not much over an hour and a half. Much depends, therefore, on what time it is now."

Dick shoved the hatch cover aside and sprang out on deck.

Then he made straight for the cabin stairs, descended them, struck a match and looked around till he spied the clock.

Glancing at its big, round face, he saw, to his consternation, that it wanted just five minutes of four.

"That settles it, I'm afraid. Mr. Brand and his burglar associate are liable to be back at any moment, probably with a load of loot. I must arouse Joe at once."

He sprang back up the brass-bound stairs.

Hardly had he reached the deck before he heard voices at the head of the wharf.

"There they come now. We'll never be able to get away. How unfortunate it was that we fell asleep! It has queered all our plans. Too bad I didn't arouse Joe before I came up here, for there isn't time for me to do it now with any safety. What shall I do? It would be foolish for me to return to the hold again. I know. I'll hide in the forepeak until I can get a chance to let Joe out of the hold. But first of all I'd better put the cover on the hatch or they'll know at once that something is wrong."

Dick had just time to do this, and seek the shelter of the forepeak when two indistinct forms, carrying loaded bags over their shoulders, appeared through the gloom that shrouded the wharf.

Holding the scuttle cover up an inch or two, Dick watched Sykes and Mr. Brand step aboard and dump their bundles on the deck near the cabin stairs.

Almost immediately the red-headed rascal's sharp eyes noticed the absence of the water cask from the top of the hatch, and that fact aroused a suspicion in his mind with respect to their prisoners.

"Look here, Brand, when we went ashore that water-barrel was on top of the hatch. I put it there on purpose to hold the cover down so that in case those young monkeys

managed to free themselves they couldn't shove the hatch up and make their escape."

"Well," replied Mr. Brand, "what about it?"

"There's this much about it: That cask should be there still and not where it is, against the starboard rail."

"It must have rolled off, then," replied Brand, not taking much interest in the matter.

"Rolled off!" snorted Sykes, almost angrily. "Well, what made it roll off?"

"How should I know? Maybe the motion of the sloop did it," said the other, hitting the correct reason at first guess. "You see how the vessel is bobbing about."

Sykes, though somewhat impressed by this logical explanation of the displacement of the breaker of water, was not thoroughly satisfied.

"Well, that may be; but I'm goin' to take a look at the prisoners to be on the safe side," he said. "Go and fetch the lantern."

As Mr. Brand started for the cabin to get the article in question, Sykes yanked off the hatch cover and leaped into the hold.

A terrible crash and a volley of imprecations, mingled with a groan or two, brought Brand back in a hurry.

The red-headed rascal had encountered an unexpected obstacle in his descent in the shape of the two boxes that Dick had placed there for a stepladder.

They had given away under him, and carried him to the bottom of the hold in a heap, where he struck his head on a piece of pig-iron ballast and lay half stunned.

"What in creation is the matter with you, Sykes?" asked Brand, astonished at the racket, as he peered down into the hatchway.

The redheaded man was hardly in condition to answer at the moment, as he felt as if a house had fallen in on him.

"What's happened to you?" repeated Mr. Brand. "Did you fall in?"

A groan, followed by a rather strong expression that won't bear repetition, was all the answer he got.

Mr. Brand began to grow alarmed.

If his companion, who was the brains of the combination, was seriously hurt, the situation was an awkward one for them both.

To escape in the vessel with their plunder would in that case be impossible, for Mr. Brand could no more sail the sloop than he could fly.

Greatly to his relief, however, he heard Sykes scramble on his feet and begin to swear like a trooper.

To his mind that was a good sign that his companion was not very badly injured.

"What's the trouble?" again inquired Mr. Brand.

"Trouble!" roared Sykes, in a great rage. "What in thunder were those boxes doing under the hatch?"

"What boxes?" asked Brand, not understanding the situation.

"I struck a pile of 'em. They gave way under me and I lost my hold somehow and went tumbling on top of 'em. I almost broke my head. What I want to know is how came they to be there?"

"How should I know? You were in the hold last yourself," answered Brand.

"By thunder! There's something wrong. Fetch a light so I can see below."

"Something wrong! What do you mean?"

"Fetch a light, I tell you!" howled Sykes, whose suspicions were aroused.

Of course, Dick, from his place of concealment in the forepeak, heard the whole of the conversation about the displaced water breaker, as well as Sykes's subsequent movements and tumble, and he knew that there would be something doing as soon as his stepfather returned with the lighted lantern.

Mr. Brand lost no time in getting the lantern from the cabin.

While he was away, Dick half resolved to escape ashore, hunt up one of the constables, and bring him down to the wharf to capture both the sloop and the two men.

There were several reasons, however, that deterred the boy from acting on that idea.

One was that it was exceedingly doubtful if he could find an officer in time to reach the sloop before she left the wharf.

A second reason was that the capture of his stepfather, with the goods on him, so to speak, would lead to his certain conviction, and for his mother's sake, he did not wish to see Mr. Brand brought to the bar.

Another thing that held him back was the half-formed hope that he, with Joe's assistance, might be able to recover the booty taken from the bank and return it without implicating his stepfather in the transaction.

"This man Sykes is bound to discover in a few moments that I've escaped from the hold, and though he may wonder why my friend Joe did not accompany me, he will naturally conclude that I went ashore to hunt up a constable to give them in charge for assault and abduction. He will then hustle to get the sloop under way in order to head me off. As neither he nor Mr. Brand will have any suspicion that I'm still on board, I may be able to find a chance to communicate with Joe and get up some plan to round up this enterprise in a way that will not bring grief to my mother."

By the time Dick had summed up matters to his own satisfaction, Mr. Brand returned on deck with the lantern.

He passed it down to Sykes, who had been impatiently waiting in the hold.

The rascal then proceeded to make an investigation.

Joe Casperfield had been aroused from his sleep by the racket, and seeing the hatchway open, and hearing the disturbance made by Sykes, he feared some complication not foreseen by Dick and himself.

He had no idea that he had been asleep more than a couple of minutes, and he put out his hand to grasp Dick, whom he supposed to be still by his side.

Not finding him there he called out, softly:

"Where are you, Dick?"

Of course he got no reply, and was rather astonished thereat.

He called again, somewhat louder, with no better result.

Then, for the first time, he became conscious of the motion of the sloop.

"Why, the boat is under way," such being his natural impression, "and I guess we've reached the lake where we've caught a wind. I wonder where Dick has got to? I can see pretty well around the hold, and there isn't a sign of him. By George! Maybe they've just yanked him out on deck, and that's the cause of the racket that awakened me."

At that moment Sykes got up and called for the lantern.

"I'll bet he's coming to take a squint at me," breathed Joe. "If he finds my arms free he'll tie me tighter than before. I wonder if I couldn't pretend that I'm still tied? I'll try it at any rate and trust to luck."

When the lantern was passed down to Sykes he made straight for the spot where Joe had thrown himself back on the sacks, with his hands behind him.

He flashed the light into the corner and saw only one boy.

Then he raised the lantern above his head and looked about the hold.

His keen glance soon assured him that Dick was not there.

Without paying further attention to Casperfield, to that youth's intense satisfaction, he rushed back to the hatchway.

"That stepson of yours has escaped!" he roared up to Mr. Brand.

"Escaped!" exclaimed Brand, incredulously.

"Yes, skipped out. That accounts for the water-barrel being off the hatch cover. The other chap is here, however, which shows that your kid expected to bring back a constable, or some other man, in short order, to lay us by the heels. Here, take this glim," passing up the lantern, "and give me a hand to get out of this. We haven't any time to lose. We must cast off from the wharf and get under way at once or there'll be trouble to burn for us."

His words gave his less hardened companion a great shock, and the way the two men got busy during the next few minutes showed that they were fully alive to the danger that they believed menaced them.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

As soon as Sykes had clapped the cover on the hatch again, and replaced the keg of water on it, he hastened to assist Mr. Brand unmoor the sloop from the wharf.

As the boat drifted out into the lake, they hoisted the mainsail first and the jib afterward, after which Sykes hastened to take charge of the helm and put the vessel on her course down the broad sheet of water on the northern shore of which Haywoods Village lay.

Mr. Brand busied himself carrying the bundles down into the cabin, then he lit his pipe and rejoined his companion on deck.

The sloop now slipped along over the choppy water at a good speed, and was rapidly leaving the village behind her.

Dick watched the two men from under the scuttle cover, and chuckled at the idea that they believed he was ashore, and that they had successfully eluded his presumed plan to capture them at the wharf.

"I'm safe enough here for two or three hours, at any rate, I guess," he said to himself. "But when Sykes comes forward to cook breakfast I'm sure to be discovered, and then there'll be trouble. Still, I might manage to move those boxes out a bit and squeeze myself in behind them. Then I might possibly escape his eagle eye."

Day was now breaking, and the sun would be up in less than an hour.

A few miles ahead was a bunch of green islands, and toward the largest of these Sykes was steering the sloop.

Dick, who kept a sharp lookout on the movements of the two men, as well as about the lake as the light gradually grew stronger and brought out the line of shore and the surrounding landscape, soon noticed that their present course would take them in among the picturesque islands.

There were several sheltered coves along the shore of the big island, known as Goat Island, and the boy began to wonder if it was the intention of the red-headed navigator to run into one of them and lie there until nightfall covered their movements down the lake to the entrance of the river, which took its rise at the southern end of the lake, and ran in a southeasterly direction for a hundred miles or more, when it formed a junction with a bigger stream that traversed the more populous section of the State.

Dick was well acquainted with nearly all of these islands, for he had visited them with Joe and other schoolboy friends more than once in a borrowed sailboat in days past, when he had the time to spare for that pleasure.

As the sun rose over the low line of hills to the east, the sloop was close to Goat Island, and soon afterward Dick found that his surmise was correct about the craft making a landing, for she presently put in at a sequestered cove.

The sails were lowered and left unfastened in the same way as at the head of the creek, and then the men, after carrying a line ashore and fastening it to a convenient tree, retired to the cabin.

Dick took advantage of their absence from the deck to slip ashore and hide in the thick undergrowth of bushes, where he could safely watch their further movements and figure on what he should do next.

Every moment he expected to see Sykes appear and go forward to the forepeak to prepare the morning meal, but the minutes went by and he did not show up.

After waiting a good half hour, Dick began to grow impatient.

"I wonder what they're doing in the cabin?" he said to himself. "Maybe counting up their plunder from the bank, and stowing it away. I daresay that's an occupation that they find great pleasure in."

As a matter of fact, that was exactly what Sykes and his associate were doing.

It took them the greater part of an hour to size up their swag and divide it, according to the red-headed man's ideas of an equitable division, which was three-quarters for himself and one-quarter for Mr. Brand.

Dick's stepfather held out for a large share of the spoils of their night's work, but Sykes carried the argument in his own favor, on the ground that he was the man who planned and really carried out the enterprise; that he had furnished the experience and tools and sloop, and that Mr. Brand was merely a kind of general assistant, and ought to be satisfied with whatever share he (Sykes) chose to give him.

Whether Brand was satisfied or not with the way his companion put the matter he could not very well help himself, as Sykes was big, strong and aggressive, and used to doing things as he chose whenever he had the advantage on his side.

As soon as the subject was disposed of, Sykes called on his companion to wash up the dirty dishes from their evening's repast, while he started in and cooked breakfast.

Dick saw him proceed to the galley, and soon smoke was issuing from the small stovepipe in the forepeak.

The light breeze blowing on shore wafted the smell of the cookery to the boy's nose and made him feel hungry.

He began to wonder how long it would be before food came his way.

"If they turn in for a sleep after the meal I can sneak aboard and perhaps find a bite of something left in the galley. Then I'll release Joe and perhaps we can capture the sloop while they're dreaming in the cabin. I know just how I'll do it if I get but half a chance."

Sykes carried the eatables into the cabin when they were ready, and nearly half an hour elapsed before the men reappeared on deck, with pipes in their mouths.

Dick saw Sykes go into the forepeak again, and after a little while, during which there was more smell of cooking, he came out with a plate full of stuff and a cup of something that Dick judged to be coffee.

These he laid down on the deck, removed the water-cask from the hatch cover and prepared to enter the hold.

"He's taking Joe some breakfast," breathed Dick, licking his hungry chops and really envying his comrade in misfortune his bit of good luck.

Sykes lowered himself into the hold, and Mr. Brand passed him the loaded dishes.

The rascal was out of sight some little time.

Then, after passing up the empty dishes, he sprang on deck, put the cover on the hatch again and replaced the water breaker.

He stood talking to Mr. Brand for a few moments, and then the worthy pair went down into the cabin again.

Dick put in another hour of impatient waiting, and finding that the men did not reappear on deck again he began to consider the advisability of venturing on board the sloop and investigating the condition of things.

"I think I can safely count on their being asleep by this time," he said to himself. "I'll have to be mighty careful, though, for I've no doubt that red-headed rascal has trained himself to sleep with one eye open."

He emerged from the bushes, took off his shoes, and crept on board.

The first thing he did was to drop down into the forepeak on the hunt for something to eat.

The fire was out and there was nothing but a dirty frying-pan and the coffee-pot on the stove.

There was half a loaf of bread and a plate with some butter on it lying on a box close by.

"That's better than nothing, by a long shot," said the hungry lad, cutting off several slices and buttering them.

With his mouth full he looked into the coffee-pot.

It was not quite empty, and he managed to get three-quarters of a cup of cold coffee.

After consuming most of the bread, all of the butter and emptying the pot, Dick felt better and ready for action in other quarters.

Poking his head cautiously above the open scuttle he saw that the deck was as deserted as ever.

"I guess they're asleep, all right, but still I'd like to make sure of it."

He got out of the forepeak and softly crossed the deck. Standing close to the cabin stairs he poked his head down the opening and listened with great attention.

The sounds of heavy breathing came up to him.

"Good. They are asleep," he said.

He was about to turn away, when a daring idea occurred to him.

He would descend the stairs and take a look at the men in order to see how soundly they appeared to be sleeping.

There was some risk in this, but it was just like Dick to do such a thing if he thought any advantage was likely to come to him from it.

So the nerry boy stepped softly down the half dozen brass-bound stairs until he stood inside the entrance to the cabin.

Then he glanced around the place into which the sunlight streamed through the small skylight in the roof of the trunk.

The table was littered with the dishes containing the remains of the morning meal.

There was a bunk on a locker on either side of the cabin.

Mr. Brand was stretched out on one, Sykes on the other. Their breathing indicated sound repose.

Dick, having seen all he wanted to was about to retreat when his sharp eye noticed the butt of a revolver sticking from under the red-headed man's pillow.

Its presence there fascinated him, and suggested great possibilities if he could but secure it himself.

"I must try and get it," he breathed. "With that in my hands, and with Joe at my back, I am almost sure that we would be masters of the situation."

To think was to act with Dick.

With the utmost caution he approached Sykes's berth, laid his fingers on the weapon and, inch by inch, drew it from its resting place.

At last, with a thrill of satisfaction, he had it in his hand, and the two men slept on, oblivious of what he was doing.

There was nothing further to detain him in the cabin, and so he returned on deck.

"Now, if I could manage to secure the sliding door over the entrance to the cabin stairs I'd have them prisoners below, and then the game would be in my hands," he said.

There was a keyhole in the slide, which showed that it could be locked, but as the key was not in it, Dick could not expect to lock it.

There was also a stout, brass ring which served in place of a handle for drawing the door to.

This gave Dick an idea.

He looked around, picked up a piece of line and making a thick knot in one end he passed the other end through the ring, shut the door over and then secured the end of the line around a cleat in the low bulwark of the sloop.

That made the door fast.

"I guess I've got them all right now," he said, triumphantly. "The next thing is to release Joe from the hold."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH SYKES AND BRAND ARE UP AGAINST IT.

Dick lost no time in removing the hatch, and jumping down into the hold.

"Hist, Joe! Where are you?" he called, in a low tone.

"What, you on board, Dick!" cried Joe, coming forward in joyful surprise. "I thought you had escaped ashore at the village. That red-headed rascal came down here with a lantern some hours ago and seemed surprised when he didn't see you. I heard him tell your stepfather that you had got away."

"I was hiding in the forepeak at the time, and stayed there till the sloop anchored in this cove, when I slipped ashore because I was afraid of being discovered."

"Then they don't know you're around?"

"They think I'm at the village. I just fooled them in great shape."

"Whereabouts is the sloop anchored?"

"At Goat Island."

"Is that so? Well, how about our getting away?"

"There's nothing to prevent us."

"Nothing? What about your stepfather and the red-headed rascal?"

"They're asleep in the cabin, and I've fixed things so they can't get out."

"You have? How?"

"Come on deck and I'll show you."

Joe lifted Dick up so he could scramble out, and then Dick assisted him out from above.

They put the cover on the hatch and walked aft, when Joe saw how his chum had secured the cabin slide.

"When they wake up and find themselves prisoners that big rascal will smash the slide to pieces. It doesn't look over strong."

"If he tries that he'll run against this," replied Dick, showing the revolver.

"Where did you get that?" asked Joe, in surprise.

Dick told him how he got possession of it.

"Well, you've got more nerve than I have," answered Joe, admiringly. "We'll have to watch both the slide and the skylight. I wish I had some kind of a weapon to back you up with," he added, looking around.

"There's a hatchet in the forepeak. Take it ashore and cut yourself a good club. That will answer as well as anything."

Joe thought Dick's suggestion a good one and followed it.

Dick sat down near the closed slide to be ready to repel any effort made by the prisoners to break out.

"Do you know whether your stepfather and the other chap got into the bank this morning, as you told me they proposed doing?" asked Joe when he returned with a serviceable club.

"I guess there's no doubt about it, for they brought a couple of loaded bags on board just before the red-headed man fell into the hold when he started to see if we were both safe down there," replied Dick.

"Did he fall into the hold?"

"Did he? I should say he did," chuckled Dick. "He fell over those boxes you remember I piled up."

"Then that was the racket that woke me up."

"It must have been, for he made noise enough to wake the dead."

"Well, what are you going to do about getting back to the village? Your stepfather is in this scrape up to his neck. How are you going to save him now?"

"I'll have to make a deal with the man Sykes."

"Is that the red-headed man's name?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a deal do you think of making?"

"After I've made it plain to him that they are both in our power, and that it will be easy for us to carry them back to the village and deliver them into the hands of the authorities, I'll consent to let Sykes off if he'll agree to deliver up all the plunder they stole from the bank."

"Supposing he won't give it up?"

"Then we'll have to make him."

"He's a pretty tough proposition to tackle."

"A revolver with six shots in it is a good argument to bring to bear on him."

"He might take the chance of your using it on him. I hardly think you'd care to shoot him."

"I shouldn't want to do so, but if I'm driven to it I'd just as soon wing him as not. I must recover the bank's money without implicating Mr. Brand."

"I hope you'll manage to get around the matter, but it looks to me as if you'll never be able to save your stepfather."

"I'll save him if it's possible for me to do it."

"I'll bet he wouldn't do as much for you."

"I'm not taking all this trouble for his sake, but for mother's."

"It's too bad that your mother married him."

"Well, I've heard that he was a pretty decent sort of man when he married her. I was only a little chap then. He's changed greatly in late years."

"Are you going to remain here until you come to terms with Sykes?"

"Yes."

"If he knuckles down to you what are you going to do?"

"Put him ashore over by the railroad."

"And Mr. Brand?"

"I'll carry him to the village and let him go."

"And what are you going to do with the sloop?"

"Turn it over to the Haywoods authorities."

"But you'll have to explain how you got possession of the stolen money. You may find that kind of awkward. The magistrate will want to know what became of the men who broke into the bank."

"He won't find out from me what I don't want to tell, and I expect you to hold your tongue about anything that's likely to cast suspicion in Mr. Brand's direction."

"Oh, I won't say a word," said Joe, earnestly.

"I think we'd better get all ready for starting. Go forward and hoist the jib. Then raise the mainsail a foot or two so it will be clear of the boom. All we'll have to do will be to cut the mooring line and we'll drift out of the cove."

Joe carried out Dick's orders and then the two boys awaited developments in the cabin.

The two men were evidently tired, for they showed no disposition to wake up in a hurry.

The morning wore slowly away, and Dick began to feel decidedly hungry again.

Handing the revolver to Joe, and telling him to keep his eyes peeled for trouble, he went into the galley and rummaged around for food.

He discovered a couple of pounds of sliced bacon, two loaves of bread, two dozen of eggs, nearly a pound of coffee and other things of a like nature.

He cooked a fresh pot of coffee, cut up a loaf of bread, fried a mess of bacon and eggs for himself and Joe, and when everything was ready fetched it over to where his companion sat on guard.

"That looks good," said Joe, hungrily. "I suppose you haven't had anything to eat since last night."

"I ate up half a loaf and part of a cup of coffee I found in the galley when I returned on board after Sykes had cooked a second mess of meat for you," replied Dick. "That only took the edge off my hunger. Now I'm going to get away with a square meal. Pitch in and let's get it out of the way. Those chaps may wake up any moment and make things interesting for us."

Nothing happened while they were eating, nor for more than an hour afterward, then they heard a noise in the cabin.

"Grab your stick, Joe. There'll be something doing in a moment," said Dick.

There was the sound of steps on the brass-bound stairs and then a fumbling of a hand at the closed slide.

Failing to get the slide to open, the person who was working at it began to swear in tones that unmistakably belonged to Sykes.

"What's the matter?" the boys heard Mr. Brand ask.

Sykes's reply was more forcible than polite, and ended up with a demand to know if Mr. Brand had closed the slide.

Dick's stepfather replied that he hadn't touched it.

"It's blamed funny, then," answered Sykes. "It was open when we turned in. I don't like the look of this. The slide is fast, and I can't budge it. Hand me that revolver of mine under the pillow and I'll batter it open."

In a moment or two Mr. Brand reported that he couldn't find the revolver.

"Yer can't find it, you lunkhead!" roared Sykes, angrily. "It's under my pillow, I tell yer."

"I looked under the pillow, and it isn't there."

With an imprecation, Sykes walked back down the stairs and looked for himself.

He didn't find it because Dick had it at that moment.

The boys could hear him raising Cain in the cabin.

By this time his suspicions that things were out of joint were in full blast.

He found a heavy piece of iron pipe in his locker, and with that he returned to the door and began to batter at it with an energy that promised to knock a panel out in no time at all.

"Stand guard over the skylight, Joe, and I'll attend to Mr. Sykes," said Dick, cocking the revolver.

Crash!

Two panels of the slide were splintered.

The wood fell out on the deck and Sykes's ferocious countenance was framed in the opening.

Matters had reached a climax at last.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE TABLES ARE TURNED ON SYKES AND BRAND.

When Sykes's eyes rested on Dick Leslie standing, revolver in hand, facing the broken cabin slide, he uttered an exclamation of rage and astonishment.

"You here, you pestiferous young monkey!" he roared.

"Yes, I'm here," replied Dick, coolly.

"Where have yer been hidin' aboard? I thought yer made yer escape."

"Don't worry yourself about where I've been hiding. I've been watching you right along."

"Who are you talking to, Sykes?" asked Mr. Brand, from the foot of the stairs.

"Who? Why, your measly stepson. I'll bet he's at the bottom of this trick."

"Do you mean to say he is on board the sloop?"

"Come up and look at him yerself," snarled Sykes.

Mr. Brand ascended the stairs and peeped out.

He recognized Dick with no little wonder, for he couldn't account for the lad being on board when both he and Sykes supposed that he had escaped at the village wharf.

"Is that my gun yer've got in yer hand?" demanded Sykes, wrathfully of Dick.

"I guess it was, but it's mine now," replied the boy.

"Yours!" howled the red-headed man, furiously. "Did you have the nerve to walk into the cabin and take it from me?"

"I did," replied Dick. "I thought it would be more useful to me than to you."

"Hand it over," snorted Sykes.

"You must take me for a fool, Sykes," returned Dick. "This revolver is the boss of the situation. If you make any further attempt to break out of that door I'll shoot. If you think I don't mean business, just try me, that's all."

There was a resolute ring in Dick's voice that warned Sykes that the boy was dangerous to monkey with.

Sykes, however, was no milk-and-water individual.

He had been up against revolvers in determined hands before, and he was accustomed to take chances.

Probably he expected that when he died it would be with his boots on.

Sykes glared at Dick in a way that would have carried terror to some boy's souls.

He raised the piece of iron pipe suddenly and hurled it against the remaining panels with a viciousness that splintered the entire door.

Then he thrust his body through the opening and came at Dick with blood in his eye.

Dick saw his danger, and realizing that he must either make good his threat or throw up the sponge, raised his revolver and with his finger on the trigger aimed point blank at the ruffian.

In another moment Dick would have fired and probably have killed or desperately wounded the crook, but that Joe, on hearing the second crash, and seeing Sykes issue through the fractured door, sprang forward and brought his club down on the fellow's head with a force and sent him stunned to the deck.

"Good for you, Joe!" said Dick, much relieved by the turn affairs had taken. "Now get a piece of rope and we'll tie him."

Joe got a short length of line forward, and between them they bound Sykes good and tight, while Mr. Brand looked on, afraid to interfere.

They dragged the crook to the hatchway and left him there.

"Now, Mr. Brand, come on deck, I want to talk to you," said Dick, returning to the cabin entrance.

His stepfather refused to avail himself of this invitation, and retreated back into the cabin.

Dick, kicking the broken slide aside, and leaving Joe to keep an eye on deck, followed him.

Mr. Brand sullenly took his seat on the bunk lately vacated by his associate, and regarded the boy with an unfriendly aspect.

Dick was afraid that the interview was not likely to be a satisfactory one.

"You and I have never got on very well together, Mr. Brand," began Dick; "and now that you have added to your other undesirable qualities the commission of a crime, I don't think we're ever likely to hitch."

Mr. Brand looked hard things at his stepson, but did not say a word.

"How did you become acquainted with that ruffian outside, and whatever was it that induced you to join hands with him in the robbery of the Haywoods Bank?"

"What's that?" snarled Mr. Brand. "How dare you say that I robbed any bank, you little liar!"

"That bluff won't work with me, Mr. Brand," replied Dick, coldly. "After you and Sykes put me down in the hold when the sloop was at the head of the creek, I found a knothole in that bulkhead and, looking through, I saw both of you seated at this table. I heard every word that passed between you about the job this morning at the bank. Then when I escaped from the hold at the village wharf I saw you both come on board with loaded bags, which I am satisfied contained the plunder you stole from the bank. That stuff is now in this cabin, and I want you to turn it over to me at once."

Mr. Brand nearly collapsed at the extent of his stepson's knowledge of his iniquity.

He realized that he was in Dick's power, and that the State prison stared him in the face.

"I suppose you mean to have me arrested," he said, sullenly. "You're a nice stepson, you are. To bring disgrace on me and your mother."

"You deserve all the punishment the law would impose on you, Mr. Brand. You went into the job with your eyes open. You knew you were taking part in a criminal affair, but you let yourself be persuaded by that ruffian outside, who, you know as well as I, is a crook."

Mr. Brand made no reply, but regarded his stepson with an unfavorable eye.

"Because you happen to be my mother's husband, I am going to try and save you from the consequences of your folly. I had hoped to prevent you from getting into the bank in the first place. Unfortunately I failed in that. I have Sykes in my power, and it would give me lots of satisfaction to turn him over to the village authorities, who would know how to deal with him; but if I did that, and let you go as I intend to, he would probably turn around and give you away. That is about as much honor as there is among thieves. So I'm going to take him over to the eastern shore and turn him loose along the railroad. That will give him the chance to make good his escape. The stolen property I intend to return to the bank. As for yourself, you can return home. No one will ever learn from me or Joe that you had any hand in the burglary of the bank. Thus you'll get out of a very serious scrape."

Mr. Brand's countenance cleared a bit, but whether he

really was grateful to Dick for his magnanimous conduct is a matter that the boy could not decide from any indication of the face on his stepfather's part.

"Now," went on Dick, "I guess you know where the money is that you and Sykes brought away from the bank. So just produce it, and then we'll set sail for the village."

Mr. Brand didn't show any great eagerness to bring the money to light.

On the contrary, an idea had struck him which he proceeded to unfold to Dick.

"You say that you're going to turn Jim Sykes loose along the railroad, eh?"

"That's my plan," replied the boy.

"If you do that he'll probably make himself scarce around this neighborhood."

"I sincerely hope he will."

"Then what's the use of doing anything further in the matter?" said Mr. Brand, with a suggestive wink.

"What do you mean?" asked Dick, in some surprise.

"What's the use of reporting to the bank that you've got possession of the money taken from their vault? You'll only get yourself into a lot of trouble. The officials will want to know all the particulars of how you came to learn about the robbery, how you followed the burglars up, and how you, a boy, got it away from them. You'll be obliged to tell all you know, and if you don't, Joe Casperfield will. As the case now stands, there is nothing to prevent us from burying that money on this island, and letting it remain here till the excitement blows over. No one will ever suspect you boys of knowing anything about the affairs, and if you chaps don't open your mouths there'll be nothing to connect me with it. Sykes will get out of the way just as soon as he can, for you can tell him that as a personal favor to me you have decided to give him two or three hours start of the constables, and that if they catch him it will be his own fault. You can also tell him that it won't be healthy for him to show up in these parts again. That will make it pretty certain that he'll stay away for good. The bank people will think that the thieves have got clear off with their swag, and then after a few weeks you, me and Joe can sail down to this island some day and divide the money. Now, isn't that a better scheme than getting yourself and me, too, into a whole lot of trouble over the return of this money, which will do us more good than the rich folks who own the bank, and who wouldn't help us to a loaf of bread if we were starving?"

Mr. Brand grew almost eloquent in his eagerness to impress Dick with the all-around benefit that would accrue to the three of them by adopting his villainous suggestion.

The boy heard him through, with disgust and indignation, though he was on the point of interrupting him more than once.

"So you have the nerve to propose such a scheme to me, have you, Mr. Brand?" he said, angrily.

"Isn't it a good one?" asked his stepfather, eagerly. "So safe and easy that it's like finding money. If you carried out your own foolish plan you'd only cast suspicion on me; and if I was arrested, think of the disgrace both to your mother and yourself. You can't do better than to fall in line with my views."

"Where is this money that you got away with from the bank?" said Dick, thinking it the part of wisdom to get

his hands on the booty before telling his stepfather what he thought of him.

"Here it is," replied Mr. Brand, making a dive into Sykes's locker and bringing out that individual's three-quarters share of the swag, which he placed on the table, close to Dick.

"Is that all of it?" asked Dick.

"That's all—every dollar."

The boy, however, had his suspicions.

"Didn't you two divide the money this morning?"

"No; we haven't touched the boodle yet," replied his stepfather, unblushingly.

Dick had his doubts of Mr. Brand's veracity.

A man capable of making such a proposal as he had just done was not to be trusted.

"I think I'll take a look into that locker myself, just to make sure you didn't make any mistake."

"All right. Do it," answered the man, moving aside to give him the chance to investigate.

Dick suspected from his extreme readiness to have him search that there was no more of the plunder in that locker, so he suddenly changed his mind and went over to the other locker.

"What are you going to do there?" asked Mr. Brand, anxiously. "There's nothing in that locker. Sykes put it all in this one."

"I'm going to examine it, just the same," and he did.

The first thing he laid his hand on was the bag containing his stepfather's share, and he pulled it out.

"What do you call this, Mr. Brand?"

He dumped several bundles of bills out on the floor.

"I suppose you didn't know that this money was here, did you?" he added, sarcastically.

Mr. Brand's face was the picture of anger and disappointment.

CHAPTER X.

DICK RESTORES THE STOLEN MONEY AND GETS A REWARD.

Dick dumped the package of bills into the other bag.

"So you think it would be a good idea to bury this bag of money somewhere on Goat Island until the excitement attending the robbery of the bank had cooled down. Then your plan would be for the three of us to come over here some day, dig it up and divide."

"That's the best thing we could do. There's \$20,000 in good bills in that bunch—nearly \$7,000 apiece—you and Joe wouldn't have to work any more," said Mr. Brand, enticingly, thinking that his stepson was about to yield to the temptation.

"Mr. Brand if I was to tell you in plain words what I think of you I don't fancy you'd be flattered. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to suggest such a rascally proposition to me, of all others. You married my mother, and instead of trying to lead me astray you ought to consider it your duty to see that I kept straight. If it wasn't for my mother I'd land both you and Sykes in the village lock-up this afternoon. It seems to me you only need the chance to turn out as bad as he is. I am thoroughly disgusted with you. I had no idea that you were half as bad as you are now showing yourself to be. I shall certainly tell

mother of your doings, and if she has anything more to do with you I will be greatly surprised.

"You miserable little milksop, if you dare tell her a word I'll——" roared Brand.

"You'll do what?" replied Dick, looking him resolutely in the eye.

"You'll find out what I'll do," answered his stepfather, doggedly.

"I'm not afraid of what you'll do, Mr. Brand," replied Dick, scornfully. "Instead of threatening me you ought to be grateful to me for letting up on you, and holding Joe from telling the truth also. Don't make any mistake but that this robbery you've participated in will hang over your head, and if you turn on me something might happen that you wouldn't like. That's all I've got to say to you."

Dick took up the bag containing the stolen money and went on deck, where he found Joe sitting beside the still unconscious Sykes.

"I've got the plunder, Joe," said Dick, holding up the bag.

"Good enough. How much is there in the bag?"

"According to Mr. Brand there is \$20,000."

"That's a big bunch of money."

"What do you suppose my stepfather had the gall to propose to me?"

"What was it?"

Dick outlined Mr. Brand's rascally scheme.

"Did you really imagine that you and me would agree to that?" asked Joe.

"He must have thought the temptation would fetch us or he wouldn't have made the suggestion."

"What answer did you give him?"

"I told him a few things that he won't forget in a hurry. If I had told him how thoroughly I despise his conduct we might have had a mix-up."

"I don't see how you can stand to have him around your house after this."

"I don't mean to have him there. I intend that mother shall have a legal separation from him. I don't mean a divorce, but a complete severance of relations. He will have to agree to it or there will be something doing he won't like. He was bad enough as a lazy, good-for-nothing man, but with the stain of a crime on his hands I'm through with him for good, and mother will be, too, as soon as I have told her all."

"When are we going to start for the village?"

"Right away," replied Dick. "You can cast the line off and let the sloop drift out of the cove. Then come and help me hoist the mainsail."

In five minutes the vessel was heading through the nest of islands for the eastern shore of the lake, where Dick proposed leaving Sykes to shift for himself.

Mr. Brand came on deck and looked around.

He did not approach either of the boys, who would have avoided him if he had done so.

Dick, who was at the tiller, kept his eye on his stepfather, as a matter of general precaution, for he did not trust Mr. Brand for a cent.

In about twenty minutes the sloop was brought as close to the shore as she would go without grounding.

"Now, Mr. Brand, take off your shoes and socks and help Joe carry Sykes ashore," said Dick, after throwing

the sloop into the best position he could for the purpose in view. "You've got a pocket-knife, I suppose, so you can cut him loose afterward."

Mr. Brand didn't seem disposed to obey this request, and started to walk forward.

"Look here, Mr. Brand, if you want me to land both you and Sykes in jail at the village, why just keep on acting as you're doing. I'll give you two minutes to make up your mind. If I have to carry your associate to Haywoods and turn him over to the authorities you'll share his fate; so unless you want to go to prison you'll do as I tell you."

As Dick showed that he was thoroughly in earnest in his attitude, Mr. Brand reluctantly concluded to do as he was told.

He and Joe carried Sykes, who had now recovered his senses, well up on the shore, then Casperfield left Mr. Brand to release his companion in crime, and hastened back to the sloop.

As soon as Brand cut Sykes loose the latter grabbed him and seemed disposed not to allow him to return to the sloop.

Dick held the sloop for a few minutes and then said to Joe:

"Stuff Mr. Brand's socks into his shoes and toss them on the beach. I'm not going to wait here any longer for him. It won't hurt him any to walk back to the village along the railroad ties. In fact, I'd prefer if he turned the other way and accompanied Sykes out of the county. He might better do it for he won't be welcome at the cottage any more, and as he has no money, the tavern-keeper is not likely to take him in. I did intend to be easy with him, hoping that he might be sorry for going into the burglary, but when he made that proposition to me to join in and hold the money back from the bank that settled him with me."

Joe fired the shoes and socks on the beach and then Dick steered the sloop out into the lake.

Two hours later they made fast to the same wharf that the boat had been anchored at in the small hours of the morning.

"Now, I'm going to the bank with the stolen funds," said Dick. "I wish you'd stay aboard till I return, if you don't mind, Joe."

Joe said he would do so, and Dick, taking the bag on his back, started for the Haywoods Bank.

That institution was situated on the most prominent corner of Main Street, and as the boy approached he saw quite a crowd around the bank.

He easily guessed that they were discussing the robbery, which, of course, was known all over the village long before that.

One of the constables was standing in front of the main door, which was closed, and on which a written notice was tacked, which informed the public that business had been temporarily suspended.

More than half the persons in the crowd knew Dick, either personally or by sight, and many nodded or spoke to him as he came up.

"What have you got in the bag, Dick?" asked one man. "Have you brought back the money that the bank lost last night?"

Of course, he intended the remark as a joke, never dreaming how near he had struck the truth, and those within hearing laughed at the very idea of such a thing.

"Sure I've brought back the money," laughed Dick. "What else should bring me to the bank?"

"Let's have a look, then," said the man, jocosely. "The officials won't admit what the extent of their loss is. They must have been pretty well cleaned out of ready cash or they wouldn't have stopped business."

"The bank has really stopped business, has it?" asked Dick.

"That's what the notice on the door says."

"Don't worry, then. They'll start up again in the morning. As soon as I hand this bag over to them the cashier will take that notice down and put up another."

The bulk of the crowd which had gathered around Dick took his words as a joke, and there was more laughter.

"I want to get into the bank, Mr. Jones," said Dick to the constable.

"Sorry, Leslie, but no one is allowed in the bank to-day."

"Oh, I'm an exception. Just knock on the door and tell anybody who comes that the stolen money is outside, awaiting admission."

"Come now, Leslie, that's too serious a joke to work off on me."

"All right. Knock on the door and have the cashier or president informed that there is a person outside who can furnish important information about the robbery."

The constable and the crowd stared at Dick on hearing his words, which were spoken in a serious tone.

"The board is holding a meeting inside. If you really are in earnest I'll rap on the door. But remember, if I do it's up to you to make good your words," said the constable, looking hard at Dick.

"Go ahead. I'll make good all right."

As the constable rapped loudly, the crowd, whose curiosity and interest had been strongly aroused, and who now began to think that the contents of the bag might represent the stolen money after all, pushed close up, and those within reach began to finger the bag curiously.

"Feels as if it might be packages of money," said one man.

A dozen hands immediately grasped the folds of the bag, and great excitement ensued.

At this point one side of the door was opened a little way and a voice asked what was wanted.

"The stolen money is here," said Dick, before the constable could speak. "Let me inside, please."

The boy was immediately allowed to enter, and then the door was slammed in the faces of the excited people outside.

While Dick was being led into the board room at the rear of the bank, the news began to circulate outside that the stolen money had been recovered.

Of course, Dick's name was circulated in connection with the funds, and long before the boy had finished his explanation to the astonished board of directors of the bank half the village had heard the rumor about the recovery of the stolen money.

Dick had decided to tell the whole truth about the affair, including his own and Joe Casperfield's adventures in connection therewith, and to beg the gentleman, for his mother's sake, and in consideration of his being so fortun-

ate as to recover the bank's funds, not to prosecute his stepfather.

Accordingly, he made a clean breast of the matter.

His story was listened to with great attention and not a little astonishment.

The money and several packages of bonds that had been taken also were counted and found to tally exactly with the loss sustained.

The vice-president then introduced a resolution thanking Dick for the part he had played in the affair, and voting him the sum of \$1,000 as a reward for his services, also \$100 to Joe Casperfield.

The motion prevailed, unanimously, and the cashier immediately handed Dick one of the packages of bills that had been taken.

The question of overlooking Mr. Brand's agency in the matter was so serious as to call forth a good deal of argument before the matter was finally settled in the boy's favor.

It was only because the directors recognized the hardship that must fall to the lot of the brave boy and his mother, if Mr. Brand was publicly branded as one of the thieves, that they consented to hush the truth up.

Dick was escorted out of the bank by the rear door, and soon afterward a fresh notice was put up on the front door, saying that the bank would resume business as usual next morning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHINESE IDOL.

"I've got something for you, Joe," said Dick, stepping on board the sloop.

"What is it?" asked Casperfield, curiously.

"One hundred dollars."

"One hundred dollars!" repeated Joe, staring at him.

"Yes. The board of directors of the bank, in consideration of the part we played in restoring the stolen funds, voted me \$1,000 and you \$100."

"You don't say!" almost gasped the surprised boy.

"Here's your share," went on Dick, presenting him with a \$100 bill.

Joe took it and his eyes bulged as he looked at the big 100 on each of the upper corners of the bill.

It represented a small fortune to the young farm boy, who had never owned as much as a \$10 bill before in his life.

"Gee! I'm rich!" he exclaimed, exultantly.

"So am I, in a way," said Dick, exhibiting ten \$100 notes.

"I should say you are. What are you going to do with so much money?"

"I'm going to give it to my mother. She needs it more than I do."

"How did you manage with your explanations? Get through all right?"

"I told the whole truth, as the easiest way out."

"You didn't give your stepfather away, did you?"

"I concealed nothing, and threw Mr. Brand on the mercy of the board. In consideration of my having brought back the money, and because of the disgrace that must attach to my mother and myself, if the facts were divulged, it was voted to cover up Mr. Brand's guilt, and to make no

further attempt to catch the criminals. So now, Joe, you must hold your tongue about Mr. Brand. When you tell your story to your parents, and others, just say that the burglars made their escape. It may be a white lie, but as it's in a good cause, your conscience won't reprove you."

"I'll be as mute as a mopstick, old man. Now what about this sloop?"

"I was told to keep it, so I'll present you with a half interest in it."

"What shall we do with it? Sell it?"

"We'll decide that question later. At present we'll go home in her."

"Take her up the creek?"

"Yes. We'll moor her where Sykes had her."

"He might come back and steal her."

"I don't imagine he will come this way soon again. At any rate, we'll risk it. So now get busy and help me cast off from the wharf."

It took them an hour to reach the sloop's former mooring ground, and then they separated, each returning to his home.

"Why, Dick, my son, where have you been?" asked his mother, when he rushed into the cottage.

She showed the evidences of a siege of anxious suspense.

"I've been up against a pretty stirring time since I left home last night, mother," replied the boy, gently forcing her down on a sofa in the sitting-room.

"I've been dreadfully worried about you," said Mrs. Brand, tearfully. "And your father hasn't been home since he left yesterday morning."

"Don't call him my father, mother. He is nothing to me and I hope from this out he will be nothing to you."

"Why, Dick," cried the little woman, looking surprised and pained by his words, for she had never heard him speak this way about his stepfather before, "what do you mean?"

"I mean, mother, that he has disgraced us both."

"Disgraced us!" she cried, in a tone of alarm and apprehension. "I don't understand what you mean."

"Then I will explain. I regret that I must distress you, but the story may as well be told now as to keep you in suspense. Whether Mr. Brand will venture here again I cannot tell. It is quite possible he may, but if I'm here I shall show him this door. He has proved himself unworthy of your regard."

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed, her tears beginning to flow. "Tell me what he has done more than usual to deserve your resentment."

"Listen, mother, and you shall judge for yourself."

Then Dick told all that happened from the moment he left the cottage the night before to visit Joe Casperfield, till the present time.

Mrs. Brand was quite overcome by his recital.

She realized that her husband had taken the road to the bad in downright earnest.

That he had shown himself to be a man utterly without principle.

It was bad enough to permit himself to be led into a crime—that she could have forgiven if he had shown some repentance for his folly when he found himself rounded up by his stepson; but to try and tempt her own dear boy to follow his vicious example almost broke her heart.

It was the last straw with her, as it had been with Dick. The boy had tried to save him from the trouble he had brought upon his own head, and his ungrateful return therefor showed what sort of man he was at heart.

Dick comforted his mother as well as he could.

He handed her the money he had received from the bank people, and it represented a little fortune to her.

"I am sure that you will find it a relief to be rid of Mr. Brand, mother," he said. "For a long time he has been little more than a husband in name. When he worked he never gave you a cent, but spent his money on liquor. He was a standing source of mortification to you, for every one who knew us was aware of his conduct. He is far better away from this village. If he gets into trouble no one here will learn of it, and you will not live in constant fear of something happening at any moment."

Dick did not leave the cottage that night, lest Mr. Brand would show up during his absence and endeavor to bulldoze his mother.

Nor did Brand make his appearance next day while Dick was at the store, nor for many weeks thereafter.

Dick continued to work in his steady way at the general store, and it is probable he would have continued in Mr. Simpson's employ for an indefinite period but for one of Fortune's strange freaks which altered his prospects entirely for the better.

Dick was first favorite among all the girls of his acquaintance, and he came to know a great many of them through his connection with the store.

Many of the girls who set their cap at him, so to speak, were daughters of well-to-do people in the village, one even being a petted niece of the cashier of the bank.

Dick could have picked out a sweetheart at will among a score of girls, but not one of them seemed to interest him to that extent.

The only girl who seemed to attract him at all was Bonnie Barton, an orphan, who lived with her grandmother in a very humble cottage not far from his own home.

For some time Dick had been in the habit of taking her twice a week to the singing-class in the public school assembly hall, and for this reason the other girls took a strong dislike to her.

They considered that she monopolized altogether too much of Dick's society, and they endeavored to retaliate by giving her the cold shoulder.

It was the worst course they could have taken to win Dick away from her.

As soon as he got on to the way Bonnie was being snubbed, he resented it by paying her twice as much attention as before, and the result of it was that the sweetness of the girl's disposition, and her gentle ways, began to have their effect on him, and he soon came to regard Bonnie in a new and very favorable light.

About a month after the bank robbery, Bonnie's grandmother took sick and died.

This misfortune threw the girl on her own resources, and many of the village maidens were ungenerous enough to hope that she would leave Haywoods for good.

It is possible she might have done so but for Dick.

He induced his mother to offer Bonnie a home, and she accepted.

A room next to Dick's was fitted up for her, and there-

after she proved of great assistance to Mrs. Brand about the house, and in tending the truck patch, which began to flourish in great shape under her care.

It was about this time that Dick, in passing the village second-hand store one evening, was attracted by a chest of ancient mahogany drawers, with curious, brass handles, and brass corner-pieces of odd design.

On top of it stood a little porcelain Chinese idol, with squatting legs and squinting eyes.

Dick was quite taken with both articles, and he entered the store and asked the price of them.

The price of the chest of drawers was \$5, the idol, which had no connection with it, was \$1.

"I'll take them," said Dick, who thought the chest of drawers would make a pretty present for Bonnie, while the idol would make an odd sort of ornament for his room. "Where did you get them?" he asked the dealer, as he was paying the money.

He was told that they came from an old house down the road that had lately been pulled down, after the property was sold, to make way for a modern dwelling now in the course of erection.

The old house in question had been built and occupied for a great many years by a man of rather sinister aspect, who, with his wife, had been the sole occupants.

Previous to putting up the house they had lived for a year in a small, stone building, half a mile further down the road.

The stone house was never occupied after they left it, and gradually went to ruin.

A portion of the ground story was still left to mark its site, and stood within a few feet of an immense, but now dead, walnut tree.

The man of sinister aspect and his wife lived the life of recluses, visiting nobody and being visited by none.

The man paid regular weekly visits to the village to make purchases of supplies and was never known to hold friendly converse with anybody.

Finally he died, and his widow lived alone in the house for many years.

It was after her death that the property was sold by the town.

The second-hand dealer had bought the few articles of furniture the house contained, and among these were the chest of drawers and the idol.

Dick took the idol home with him, and next day the chest of drawers was delivered at the cottage and installed in Bonnie's room.

That evening Joe called and Dick showed him the idol.

Both boys were agreed that its equal was not to be found in Haywoods, and Dick was satisfied that he had got it dirt cheap.

"It's got the most sarcastic grin on its face I ever saw in my life," remarked Dick, as they stood and looked at it. "I've only owned it twenty-four hours, yet I never look at it but I feel like punching it in the eye. That grin make me mad."

"It certainly has a tantalizing smirk," admitted Joe. "But that's the way with those Chinese ornaments. I suppose the Chink who made that, thirty or forty years ago, intended that for a seraphic smile. Are you going to leave it on your bureau?"

"No. I just put that little wall bracket up there to hold it."

Dick removed the idol to the bracket.

"How does it look there?" he added.

"Fine," said Joe. "If you ever get tired of it I'll buy it for \$2."

"I don't think I'll ever sell it in spite of its diabolical grin," replied Dick.

An hour later, Dick was getting ready for bed when his eyes were attracted to the idol.

A flood of moonlight coming through the window opposite cast a halo of white light around the ornament.

As Dick looked at it in a fascinated kind of way, the grin seemed to grow more sarcastic than ever.

"Oh, you make me tired, you old squint-eyed lobster!" exclaimed the boy, shaking his fist at the idol. "What are you grinning at, anyway? One would almost think you were alive to look at you now. What are you thinking about? Nothing good, I'll bet. You look just as if you thought you had got the bulge on somebody. Maybe you're laughing at me for having been such a chump as to pay a whole dollar for you. Come now, can't you do something besides squat there and grin like a fiend? Let me see you do something else."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth before the bracket gave way and down went the idol on the floor, with a crash that scattered its remains over a yard of the carpet.

"My gracious!" gasped Dick, in dismay. "It's done for now."

CHAPTER XII.

A FREAK OF FORTUNE.

"Too bad," soliloquized Dick, gazing regretfully at the remains of the idol. "I guess I didn't fasten that bracket secure enough. The old Chink was pretty heavy for its size. Well, his name is mud now, and I'm a dollar out."

He stooped down and began to gather up the pieces.

Every bit of it almost had gone to small fragments—all but the head.

That, singular to say, with its sardonic grin, was still intact.

"Well, upon my word, it must have been that grin that saved your phiz," said Dick, as he looked at the head of the idol. "You couldn't lose it even under the most strenuous of circumstances, could you? Well, I'll keep you, if only for the sake of your beastly smirk."

Thus speaking, Dick placed the head on his bureau and went to bed.

Next morning was Sunday, and Dick, glad that he didn't have to go to the store to open up at seven, took an extra nap and finally turned out about eight o'clock.

"Well, old chap," said Dick, as he was adjusting his collar and tie, addressing the grinning head of the Chinese idol, "you met with hard luck last night, didn't you? But judging from the cheerful expression on your phiz it doesn't seem to worry you worth a cent. I wonder if I couldn't glue you to a piece of fancy wood?"

He took the head up and looked at it.

Then he saw that there was an opening in the neck, indicating that the head was hollow.

He casually turned it over and glanced into the hole.

There was a piece of paper inside.

Inserting his finger he drew it out, and was about to throw it away when it occurred to him to open it out and look at it.

He found there was writing on it—something scribbled in a scrawling hand.

He had no trouble in deciphering the few words.

This is how they read:

"He who is lucky enough to find this paper may regard it as a freak of fortune. Let him go to the old walnut tree which stands within a dozen feet of the ruins of the stone house once used as a dwelling by me and my wife. The tree apparently sound and solid at its roots is really hollow. An axe will readily reveal what has for twenty years been concealed within. For reasons known only to myself, and must forever remain unexplained, I put it there, and bequeath it as a legacy to whoever finds it, either by accident or through this paper.

"(Signed) JOHN HAWKESLEY."

Dick stood for several minutes with his eyes riveted on the writing.

"What the dickens can this mean? Something buried in the hollow trunk of that old walnut tree down the road? What can it be that is hidden there? 'He who is lucky enough to find this paper may regard it as a freak of fortune,' he breathed, re-reading the first line. "That indicates something of value to be there. Why should a person conceal anything of value in the hollow of a tree for some stranger to find and profit by? It doesn't seem natural for any man to do this unless he was not in his right mind. Maybe this is a joke. And yet this idol certainly came from John Hawkesley's house. I never saw him, for he died a good many years ago; but from what I've heard of him he didn't seem to be a man who took an interest in jokes. They say he looked like a pretty hard customer. There was some mystery about him and his wife, at any rate. They never were friendly with, or even spoke to, any of the people who lived near them. They were regular hermits. Well, I think it will do no harm to investigate the matter, at any rate. If there's nothing in it I won't be any worse off for looking into it. I shan't tell anybody but Joe about this, so there is no danger of any one having the laugh on me, if the whole thing is a fake."

Dick placed the paper in his vest-pocket and went downstairs, where he found breakfast waiting.

At nine o'clock he went to Sunday school with Bonnie, where he met Joe and most of the girls and boys he knew.

After church Joe walked back with them.

"What do you think, Joe," said Dick, after they had got started along the road, "that idol of mine met with a serious accident."

"It did? What happened to it?"

"The bracket broke down and it took a tumble."

"You don't say. Did it break?"

"Its body went into about a dozen pieces, but the head was not injured at all."

"That's too bad. I suppose the head is no good without a body."

"The head was the best part of it. I'm going to glue it to a piece of wood so it will look as if the rest of it was

buried underneath. That's the best I can do with his grinning idolship."

"What made the bracket break? Did you secure it well enough?"

"I thought I did, but it seems that I didn't."

"Well, you're out a dollar."

"Probably, but I may be in something else."

"What else?"

"That is a mystery as yet."

"A mystery!" laughed Joe. "I like mysteries, but still I don't take much stock in them."

"Come around after dinner, will you, and we'll investigate it together."

"All right."

A few minutes afterward they parted at the gate of Dick's home, he and Bonnie entering the house, while Joe went on.

It was about three o'clock when Joe made his appearance again.

"Are you ready to go on a little expedition?" asked Dick.

"Sure I am. Where to?"

"Down the road, about two miles."

"I'm with you."

"Wait till I get an axe."

"What are you going to do with an axe?"

"Open up the mystery."

"I suppose you expect to solve it by axe-i-dent," chuckled Joe.

Dick went to the outhouse and brought the axe.

"Before we start I'll let you in on all I know about it. Here is a paper I discovered tucked away in the head of that Chinese idol. Read it and let me know what you think about it."

He handed his chum the paper and Joe read it.

"You found this in the idol's head, did you?"

"Yes, and the idol came from the Hawkesley house that was torn down a couple of months ago."

Joe read the paper a second time, more carefully than before.

"Maybe there's a lot of money hidden in that tree," he said, eagerly.

"I wish there was, but it doesn't seem reasonable for a person to hide money in a tree and then leave a clew like this for any stranger to find it by."

"That's so. If it isn't money it must be something valuable."

"I'm afraid the whole thing is a fake. I've passed close to that old dead tree a score of times, and I guess you have, too. Now, I never noticed anything about it to show that the trunk wasn't perfectly solid, like any other tree."

"That's right," nodded Joe.

"Now, supposing it actually is hollow, how was anything concealed within it without leaving any signs of an opening having been made?"

"The opening may have been made in the back."

"Or the trunk being hollow all the way up to the crotch whatever is inside may have been dropped in at the top."

"Exactly," coincided Joe.

"Well, we'll go down to the tree and see what we can make out of it. Bonnie is coming along, too."

Dick called the girl and she came outside with her hat

on, followed by her only possession, Dewey, a medium-sized hound she had raised from a pup.

Dick had already taken Bonnie into his confidence, and consequently she understood why Dick carried the axe.

"Let's each give a guess as to what we'll find in the tree," said Joe.

"What's your guess?" asked Dick.

"A tin box full of bank-notes and papers," replied Joe. "What do you say?"

"I am almost inclined to think that we shall find, if we find anything, the evidences of some crime committed by John Hawkesley. From all I've heard about him he seems to have been a pretty hard character. I heard Mr. Brand tell mother once that in his opinion John Hawkesley had once upon a time been an outlaw or road agent."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he was. Father has remarked more than once that Hawkesley looked like a man who had something on his conscience."

"Well, whatever he was, or whether he had anything on his conscience or not, he's dead and gone now for good."

"So you guess we'll find evidences of a crime, eh?" said Joe. "What do you think is hidden in the old tree, Bonnie?"

"I guess there's a barrel heaping full of money," she replied, with dancing eyes.

"Well, if there is, Bonnie, you'll come in for a share of it," laughed Dick.

They talked of nothing but the result of the expedition, which, to say the truth, was a problem.

At length they came in sight of the ancient walnut with the crumbling stone house beside it.

Both were fenced off from the road, and there were no houses in sight.

They entered the enclosure through a break in the fence and walked over to the tree, which they first surveyed on all sides.

It looked as solid as any tree they had ever seen in their lives, and there was nothing to show that a hole had ever been made in it.

"If there's anything concealed inside that trunk it must have got there through an opening in the top," said Dick.

Neither boy cared to climb the wide trunk to investigate, as his Sunday clothes would have suffered thereby.

"It will be something of a job to cut into that old thing," said Joe. "However, if you say so I'll start the ball rolling."

"You can have the honor if you want to," replied Dick, handing him the axe.

Joe took off his jacket and began operations.

He was a strong-armed lad and the chips flew fast.

Inside of ten minutes the axe had opened up quite a hole in the wood, and then the next stroke met with so little resistance that the weapon buried itself right up to the handle.

"It is hollow!" cried Joe, in some excitement, as, with considerable difficulty, he released the blade.

Then all looked at the hole and saw a dark void beyond the thin dent made by the axe.

"This begins to look interesting," said Dick, eagerly, while Bonnie held her breath in expectation of what was to follow.

Joe worked away now like a good fellow and soon enlarged the hole considerably.

Both boys in turn tried to look inside, but met with little success.

Dick felt for his match-safe, but recollected that it was in his other trousers.

Joe didn't have any matches about him, either, so he resumed work more eagerly than ever.

His arms, however, grew tired before any discovery had been made, and Dick grabbed the axe and got busy, while Joe put on his jacket so as not to get cold, for he was perspiring like a good fellow.

Dick hacked away, clearing a space all the way to the roots along the surface of the trunk, and then striking inward.

In this way he gradually enlarged the opening Joe had begun, and as the light penetrated into the tree it soon became apparent that there was something inside.

This something gradually developed into a stout keg.

"You're a wonderful guesser, Bonnie," said Dick. "It is a small barrel. The question is what does it contain?"

"Why, money, of course," laughed the girl. "If the first part of my guess has come true, why not the other part?"

"No such luck, I'm afraid," replied Dick. "That's too good to turn out true."

He stuck his arm through and felt of the barrel.

"It's heavy, at any rate," he said, withdrawing his arm and resuming work.

He devoted his efforts now to widening the hole so that he could haul the keg out of its prison.

Finally he thought that the opening was broad enough to accomplish this.

Throwing the axe aside, Dick seized the barrel and tried to dislodge it from its hiding-place.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Casperfield, in astonishment. "It's chock full of money."

Such was the fact, and Bonnie Barton uttered a little shriek of delight.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOLD THAT VANISHED.

As Dick had to tilt the keg to drag it out a score or more of brown-looking twenty-dollar pieces fell out and rolled over toward the dog, who seemed to be as much interested in the proceedings as the rest.

At length Dick got the keg of money out in the light and all gathered about it in great excitement.

It was a find for fair, and if all the coins in it were \$20 pieces the sum total would be all of fifty or seventy-five thousand dollars.

"Talk about luck," ejaculated Joe, at length, "you seem to have struck it good and hard. Why, there's a mint of money in that keg—enough to make you independent for life. That Chinese idol was the biggest kind of an investment. Just as good as though you had bought a ticket in a lottery for a dollar and then won the capital prize."

Dick said nothing.

He was simply overcome by the remarkable good fortune that had come to him through the grinning idol.

"How are you going to carry that keg home?" asked Joe.

"The only way I see is for you to go to the farm, harness up one of your light wagons and drive down here. We haven't anything in the shape of a rig at our house," replied Dick. "I'll see that you get a share of this money for your help in the matter."

"Do you mean that, Dick?" cried Joe, eagerly.

"Certainly I do."

"Then I'm off like a shot. If anybody comes down the road while I'm gone, don't let them get on to what you've found, or else the news will be all over the village before morning and then somebody might think he had a claim to the gold, for we don't know who owns this field."

Joe started off while Dick, after rolling the keg into the shrubbery, sat down with Bonnie to await his return.

They talked together in a confidential way and supposed they were alone, for not a soul had come in sight along the road since they entered the little field where the tree and ruin were.

But there had been two observers of all that had passed from the moment the boys and Bonnie came upon the scene.

Two men, hidden in the ruin of the old stone house, had observed the arrival of the trio and wondered what had brought them there.

These men were none other than Mr. Brand and his associate, Jim Sykes.

After withdrawing to a neighboring town on the river below the lake on the day they had been left by the boys on the eastern shore, near the railroad tracks, they had at length ventured back, bent on revenge for the throw-down received at the hands of Dick Leslie.

If Dick had known of their presence in the neighborhood he certainly would not have felt easy.

If he had also had a glimmering of their intentions toward him he would undoubtedly have taken every precaution to avoid them.

But he was entirely ignorant of both those facts, and consequently off his guard.

The two rascals had from their concealment watched the attack on the old, dead walnut tree with some astonishment and not a little curiosity.

They had no intention just then of making their presence known, on account of Joe and Bonnie, and so they lay low and awaited developments.

The discovery of the cask of gold coin, however, entirely altered their plans.

From the conversation of Joe, Dick and Bonnie they soon perceived that the young people had uncovered a veritable treasure-trove, and they immediately resolved to secure possession of it for themselves, at any cost, for this was a golden opportunity to provide themselves with unlimited funds never likely to come their way again.

While they were considering how they should make their attack on the trio the departure of Joe for the wagon greatly simplified matters for them.

It was comparatively child's play, they thought, to knock out Dick and the girl, and then carry off the money to the marsh near the head of the creek where the sloop still lay moored, though they were not yet aware of that fact.

To make things all the easier for them, Dick and Bonnie, with the dog at her feet, sat against the fence, near the tree, so that it looked simple for them to crawl up on the

other side and grab them before they woke up to the realization of their peril.

That is exactly the programme that the rascals adopted.

And there is no doubt but that it would have been successful but for the dog.

As Mr. Brand and Sykes were sneaking upon the unsuspecting pair, the hound's acute sense of smell detected their approach and he sprang to his feet and began to bark.

Dick and Bonnie looked about, but did not see their enemies, who were behind, on the other side of the fence.

Presently, however, the animal sprang at the fence, then Dick jumped up and—confronted Sykes.

The boy was taken by surprise.

Before he could recover himself the ruffian struck him a heavy blow with his fist between the eyes, and Dick went down like a shot.

Bonnie uttered a scream of alarm.

The hound leaped through the fence at Sykes, who downed him with a vicious kick.

The dog quickly recovered and went for the scoundrel in red-hot earnest.

In the meantime Brand vaulted the fence, grabbed Bonnie and stifled her cries with his hand.

She tried to fight him off, but he seized her by the throat and she soon sank insensible on the grass.

"Come here, Brand," roared Sykes; "get a stone and brain this beast!"

Mr. Brand picked up a stick, fortunately not thinking of the axe, and attacked the hound with it, finally compelling him to haul off.

The rascals then climbed the fence and pulled the keg of gold out of the bushes, where they had seen Dick place it.

A glance at its contents made their eyes bulge with satisfaction and their mouths water.

"There must be \$50,000 in that keg," said Brand, feverishly.

"There's all of that, bet yer life!" grinned Sykes.

"How are we going to carry it off?"

"Take off yer coat," said Sykes, peeling his off. "We'll make two loads of it. I'll carry the biggest one."

The coats were spread on the grass and Sykes poured the contents of the keg into them, putting the larger share in his own.

Gathering the ends of the coats together, like a pudding bag, they tied them up with some pieces of rope they had, and then lifting their bundles on their shoulders they started for the marsh.

Bonnie recovered her senses in time to note the direction taken by the rascals, and then she threw herself down beside Dick and tried to revive him.

She had little difficulty, as he was coming to, anyway.

He felt decidedly groggy at first, but came around soon.

The first thing he noticed was the keg which had contained the gold lying on its side quite empty.

"Good Lord! The rascals have taken the money!" he cried, almost in despair. "Did you see which way they went, Bonnie?"

The girl pointed out the direction in which she had seen the two men vanish.

"They've gone toward the marsh and the head of the creek," said Dick. "They must know that the sloop is there. It will be easy for them to escape in her, and the

money will be lost to me. I must follow them at once. How long have they been gone?"

"Only a few minutes," replied Bonnie.

"Then I'll be able to head them off, for they have more than two miles to go, and loaded down with that gold they won't be able to travel fast. Now, Bonnie, I want you to hurry up the road and meet Joe. Tell him what has happened. That Sykes and my rascally stepfather have come back to this neighborhood, and that they've got possession of the money we found in the tree. Tell him to let you drive his rig down to our house and to follow me himself to the head of the creek where the sloop is. Do you understand, Bonnie?"

"Yes, Dick," she said, and, calling her dog, started up the road, while Dick sprang over the fence and followed on the track of Sykes and Mr. Brand.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE TREASURE.

Sykes and his companion found the gold a heavy load for them to carry, and they were compelled to make frequent stops for rest.

In fact, their progress was so slow that Dick reached the sloop a long time in advance of them.

His first idea was to send the craft adrift so that the rascals could not make use of her, but as there was scarcely any wind, and no flow of tide to speak of, he found this to be almost impracticable.

Then he decided to hide in the forepeak and try and take the men by surprise in some way.

He found there the club Joe had provided himself with that morning on Goat Island, and it was a very effective weapon in determined hands.

Crouching down under the scuttle cover he impatiently waited for what was to come, hoping that Joe might turn up in time to help him out.

It was a good twenty minutes before anything developed, and then Dick saw Sykes and his companion approaching slowly, staggering under their golden burdens.

Their astonishment was great, while their satisfaction was unbounded when they saw the sloop moored to the same old stump.

"We're right in it, Brand!" cried Sykes, gleefully. "This will let us out of all the trouble we looked for. We'll sail out into the lake and down to the river, while we're bein' hunted for ashore. Carry your bundle aboard and we'll lose no time gettin' off while the chance is ours."

Brand was glad to get his load on the sloop's deck.

He was about done up by the weight of it, added to the terror of possible capture, by the way, for he didn't begin to possess the nerve of his associate in guilt.

Sykes followed him on board, and as soon as they laid their bundles down they cast the stops off the mainsail and hoisted it, then set the jib and finally released the shore line from around the stump.

Finding that the sloop still clung to her mooring spot they stepped ashore and taking the after-line over their shoulders, started to tow her, stern foremost, down the creek.

This was mighty slow work, but it was the only way they could start the sloop on her way to the lake.

When they got the vessel to a part of the creek wide enough for her to turn around, they tied her stern on to the shore and manipulated the sails to catch the faint breeze.

In this way they got her bow pointed in the right direction, then they cast off the stern line and the sloop gradually drifted into the middle of the stream.

Dick observed all their movements from under the scuttle cover, and it afforded him a great deal of satisfaction to note that the sloop made such poor headway.

The rascals were most eager to escape from the creek, for their chances would be much better out on the lake.

Dick was sorry that he had missed Joe.

His chum's services would have been of great value in the present emergency.

Since he was deprived of Joe's help he had to rely entirely on himself.

As he was outnumbered, two to one, by the enemy, strategy alone he figured would turn the tables in his favor.

The sloop crawled down the creek at a snail's pace, with Sykes at the tiller, while Brand busied himself carrying the two bundles of gold into the cabin, and stowing them away in the lockers.

When Brand returned on deck he and Sykes lighted their pipes and conversed together.

Dick was too far away to hear what they were talking about, but judged that they were figuring out their future plans.

In the course of three-quarters of an hour the sloop drifted out into the lake and her head was turned to the southward.

It was now nearly six o'clock, and there was scarcely breeze enough to fill the sails, so that the vessel made very slow progress.

Dick noticed that the men were continually on the alert, as though they feared a possible pursuit.

"I guess there isn't much danger of them coming forward and discovering me here. As there's nothing aboard to cook they'll have no call to come into the forepeak. They'll keep right on for the river and not stop till they reach Cloverdale, where they will probably haul in for provisions. It will take them all night to get there at this rate. At any rate, my chance won't come till one of them goes ashore. I hope it may be Sykes, but I'm afraid he'll never leave the sloop with all that gold aboard of her. If he remains aboard I'll have a tough job to down him unless I can take him off his guard. However, I'm not going to lose that money if there is the ghost of a show to prevent it. That gold represents a big fortune for me, and I'm ready to take all kinds of chances to recover it."

Such was the tenor of Dick's thoughts as the craft drew further and further out into the lake.

At sundown the breeze freshened, much to the satisfaction of the two rascals, and soon the sloop was making good progress toward the entrance of the river, two miles distant.

Darkness gradually fell on the landscape, the stars came out and the night promised to be clear and beautiful.

This promise, however, was not fulfilled, for before long the low rumbling of distant thunder in the northwest announced the approach of a thunderstorm.

It came on with great rapidity, preceded by a gale of

wind that sprang up so suddenly that the two men had to hustle to take a couple of reefs in the mainsail.

The sloop was now pitching about on the foam-capped surface of the lake and rushing toward the river like a wild seabird.

The clouds soon covered the sky like a dense pall, and the rain came down in sheets, sounding above Dick's head like the roll of many drums.

Mr. Brand had retreated to the cabin, as he found he was of no use on deck and did not relish the ducking that Sykes was getting.

That rascal stood at the helm in his shirt-sleeves and guided the boat in good shape.

Had he not been an experienced boatman the fate of the sloop would soon have been decided by her going aground on the southeastern shore of the lake.

Sykes, however, in spite of the gloom, seemed to know his way to the river, and while the storm was at its height the boat passed from the lake into that stream and flew along southward toward Cloverdale.

Dick passed an anxious time during the worst of the storm, for he felt that unless Sykes knew his surroundings pretty correctly there was great danger of the boat going ashore, in which event the three of them stood no small chance of losing their lives.

Sykes did not intend to make a landing until driven to it by hunger, for he could not tell but the telegraph had been at work, and that officers might be on the lookout for him along the water fronts of the towns.

He had decided to push on to Silicia and haul in a mile above that town, when he intended to send Brand forward to buy enough provisions to last them for the trip to the city they were aiming for on the connecting river.

It was about this time that Sykes, after taking a sharp lookout ahead, fixed the tiller so that it would hold in one position for awhile, and then went below into the cabin.

As long as Sykes remained at the helm Dick knew he could not come on deck without his presence on board being at once discovered.

Now that the deck was temporarily deserted, he conceived the daring plan of moving aft, taking up his position behind the companionway opening, with the club poised, ready for business, and when Sykes came up again to lay him out with an unexpected blow.

It involved considerable risk, for if the darkness rendered his aim ineffective, the rascal might, through his strength and agility, turn the tables on him.

Still on the principle that nothing ventured nothing is won, he determined to put the plan into operation.

"I am probably risking all on a single cast of Fortune's dice," breathed Dick, "but somehow I feel confident that success will come my way. At any rate, I'm tired of hugging this forepeak and being a passive spectator in this little drama, which is so important to me. I'm just in the humor for taking a hand in the proceedings."

He did not wait to allow his resolution to grow cold, but crawled out of the little galley, club in hand, and glided aft, like a shadow in the gloom.

He had hardly taken up his position near the opening when he heard footsteps on the brass-bound stairs.

Believing it to be Sykes, he nerved himself for the encounter.

A moment later a head and shoulders rose out of the companionway.

He did not stop to look closely, as the figure presented a tempting mark, but swung his club down with full force.

A cry rang out on the night air, and the man pitched forward in a senseless heap on the deck.

"What's wrong up there?" roared out the voice of Sykes from below.

Dick's heart almost stopped beating.

It was not the burly villain, after all, that he had knocked out, but his stepfather, Mr. Brand.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

As Mr. Brand was in no shape to reply to his companion's hail, Sykes, wondering what had happened on deck, came rushing up to find out.

As Sykes sprang out on deck he stumbled over Brand's legs, which lay in his path, and which he didn't notice in his hurry and on account of the darkness.

The result was that Sykes pitched forward over Brand's body, his head hit the low rail and he disappeared over the sloop's side.

There was a splash, a hoarse cry, partly drowned by the wind, and the submerged rascal was soon left far in the wake of the vessel.

The lurching of the craft had also thrown Dick across the cabin opening, the club flying out of his hand and winging its way overboard.

When he recovered his feet he realized that he and his unconscious stepfather were the only ones on board the sloop.

The whole thing had happened so quickly that it quite staggered him, and for several moments he could only stare around and wonder.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "Sykes has gone overboard and is somewhere back yonder in the river. Unless he's a good swimmer it will be all up with him, for I'd never be able to find and pick him up, even if I dared attempt it."

Not caring to see Mr. Brand go the same road, as he stood some chance of doing if another flaw struck the vessel, he seized his stepfather by the legs and dragged him down into the cabin, leaving him on the floor to recover his senses in due course.

Dick then ran on deck, master of all he surveyed, and took charge of the tiller.

Bringing the sloop up into the wind, and allowing the boom to swing over to port, the boy started to beat his way back the way they had come.

The wind being against him, he found that he would have to work back by short tacks, according as the stream diverged from a straight course.

It was close on to daylight when he entered the lake and headed for Haywoods.

Several hours had elapsed since the startling even which had placed him in full possession of the vessel had occurred, and he had heard nothing from Mr. Brand.

"I must have given him a terrible crack. I took him for Sykes, and laid on with all my strength. I hope I didn't

fracture his skull. I would not like to be responsible for his death, bad as he is."

When the sun rose in a cloudless sky the sloop was but a short distance to the eastward of Goat Island.

Dick decided to put in at one of the coves for a short time while he attended to Mr. Brand, if he needed any particular attention.

Fifteen minutes later he hauled down the mainsail and allowed the vessel to drift into a small cove.

As soon as she came to a stop he let down the jib also.

Seeing that she would lie in her present berth without being moored to the shore, Dick ran down into the cabin.

Mr. Brand still lay insensible on the floor, and the boy looked at him with some anxiety.

"Well, the only thing I can do is to lift him into one of the bunks," mused Dick. "If he doesn't regain his senses by the time I reach the village I'll have to send for a doctor to attend him."

So Dick raised him and placed him on the starboard bunk, with his head on a pillow.

"I wonder what they did with the money?" he asked himself, looking around the cabin and seeing no sign of the bundles. "Perhaps they are stowed in the lockers."

On examination, Dick found a bundle in each locker and pulled them out.

"Well, thank goodness, I've recovered it. That's a great satisfaction to me, at any rate. If I had lost that treasure, which came to me in such a curious and unexpected way, I should have been all broken up. I wonder if I couldn't make small, portable bundles of it? Then it would be easy to handle. Won't mother be astonished when I show her all this wealth and tell that it is all mine. No more store work for me after this. I'll go to school and finish my education, and then I'll be able to embark in some business in which there is a future."

Dick cut up a dozen pieces of canvas, and dividing the money into that many piles tied up the mouth of each with a stout cord.

Then he stowed them away in the port locker and covered them with a piece of sailcloth.

"No one would ever suspect that under that there is fifty to seventy-five thousand dollars in good American gold coin," he said to himself, in a tone of great satisfaction, shutting the locker.

He was about to return on deck and put the sloop on her course once more, when Mr. Brand opened his eyes, and after staring at Dick for a moment struggled to a sitting posture.

He seemed to be a good bit dazed, which was not to be wondered at considering the whack his brain-pan had sustained.

"How do you feel, Mr. Brand?" asked Dick, reassured by his stepfather's recovery.

Brand glared at him in no friendly way.

"What happened to me, and where is Sykes?" he asked, in a sulky tone.

Dick told him what had happened to his companion, and explained that he had sailed the sloop back as far as Goat Island, and was about to continue the trip to the creek.

Then he upbraided his stepfather for his conduct, and

told him that he need never expect to return to the cottage.

"However, I'll do more than the fair thing by you," continued the boy. "Here is a \$20 gold piece. Take the first train for Cloverdale, and take a room at the Bates House. I'll call there in a few days with a sum of money to start you out in the world on your own hook. It will be all you'll get from us, so I advise you to make good use of it. If you should reform your habits, and become a respectable man, you may write and let us know how you are getting on, otherwise we don't want ever to hear of you again. Now, if you feel able, I want you to come on deck and assist me in getting the sloop underway again."

Mr. Brand listened to his stepson in a stolid way, and, without uttering a word, followed the boy on deck.

The sails were hoisted and an hour later the sloop put in at one of the village wharves, where Dick told his stepfather to go ashore, which he did.

Dick then carried the vessel up the creek, moored her at her old anchorage, and went home, where he was joyfully received.

Bonnie had already told Mrs. Brand about the money that Dick had found in the old walnut tree, how it was stolen by Mr. Brand and Sykes, who had come upon them so unexpectedly, and how Dick had started to recover it, so that all that Dick had to tell was his adventures from the moment he parted from the girl.

After breakfast he and Bonnie made several trips to the sloop and brought the bags of gold to the cottage.

It was subsequently deposited in the Haywoods Bank to Dick's credit.

Dick carried out his purpose of giving up work and finishing his education, and in due time went to college, from which he graduated with honors.

He and Joe then went into business in Silicia, to which town his mother and Bonnie, now a bright and handsome young lady of nineteen, removed as a matter of course.

Soon after their arrival, Bonnie became Mrs. Dick Leslie, and the mistress of a fine home on one of the principal residential streets of the town.

Dick is now a prosperous man, and was lately elected Mayor of Silicia.

He maintains that his success in life was largely due to his fortunate purchase of the little Chinese idol, as well as to his carelessness in not securing the bracket properly to the wall that evening, and his most treasured possession is the grinning head of the mannikin, which he regards as

THE END.

Read "THE PRINCE OF WALL STREET; OR, A BIG DEAL FOR BIG MONEY," which will be the next number (94) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

Forty-one years ago Jacob Schuellbacher, a millionaire brewer, shoe manufacturer and real estate owner of Peoria, Ill., then a boy in Germany, led a cow two and one-half miles, for which he was promised two and a half cents.

The owner of the cow failed to pay, but Schuellbacher never forgot. Even after he had won a fortune he continued to dun a nephew of the debtor, who lives in Chicago, for the money.

Some time ago the debt was paid. Meeting the nephew in the Rookery Building, Mr. Schuellbacher demanded the money. An accountant figured out the debt at compound interest and said it amounted to 77 and a half cents. To each of his three sons Schuellbacher gave twenty-five of the pennies. He kept two cents and the half of a penny which had been sawed in two to effect an accurate settlement of the claim.

One of the physicians at a popular winter health resort was looking over his books one day, comparing his list of patients.

"I had a great many more patients last year than I have this," he remarked to his wife. "I wonder where they have all gone to?"

"Well, never mind, dear," she replied; "you know all we can do is to hope for the best."

There were only three houses in the little hamlet on Cape Cod, but an orator from a nearby summer colony was minded to rouse the civic conscience by declaring that trade was the beginning of wisdom. "And," said he, "I assure you that it is not capital half so much as it is initiative that is needed in a place like this."

The three citizens spat collectively and simultaneously, looking straight ahead.

"That kind o' reminds me," drawled one, without shifting his gaze, "o' Harve Upham an' Dan Winsor, down the beach a ways. Harve had a shanty an' Dan had a shanty, an' they both had some plug tobacco. One day Harve went to Dan's an' bought ten cents' wuth o' tobacco, an' the next day Dan went to Harve an' bought ten cents' wuth o' tobacco off him. They continued these sales sev'ral days," concluded the speaker. "They both got all the tobacco they wanted, an' Harve fin'ly retired on the dime."

That smoking has a value beyond a mere solace was illustrated recently on the trip of a British royal party around the world. The party consisted of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and their daughter, the Princess Patricia. While in China they visited Canton, where small-pox was epidemic, and to avoid infection the ladies smoked cigarettes incessantly, while the Duke kept a cigar in his mouth constantly throughout his stay in the city. The danger was a very real

one, as infected persons were allowed to mingle freely with the crowd.

When people know you are making money you can afford to wear old, shabby clothes. But when you're hard up put on the best togs you can get. You know it doesn't make any difference how bad a wolf feels, just so he doesn't show his distress. Once he begins to limp and whine the rest of the pack are upon him in a trice, ready to eat him up.

A Berlin landlord thus advertises an eligible flat: "Nine large rooms, bath and necessary offices, hot and cold water, gas and electric light, electric lifts, vacuum cleaning, fur-coat depository, safe deposit vaults, and in every flat is installed a carpet cleaning machine, a large clock regulated by electricity from the Berlin Observatory, and a mangling machine."

Extract from a British schoolboy's essay on how England colonizes: "I will tell you how England obtains her colonies. First she sends out her missionaries, and they look about for the best land. When they have found it they call the people to prayer, and when their eyes are fast shut up goes the Union Jack."

Glacier ice is now delivered to some of the larger consumers of Lyons and other cities of Europe. There are so many railways in the Alps at present that it has been found profitable to gather this ice and transport it to the cities, where it is preferred to other ice because of its hardness and lasting qualities. This ice is blasted and mined in the same manner as stone is quarried.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Danny Tracy, widower, did his second courting through a matrimonial agency, and in time formed an alliance with Abigail Jones, widow, who lived in a neighboring State. He went to her home for the ceremony, and seemed rather ill at ease while it was being performed.

When they were safely married he cleared his throat and announced to his bride that he had a confession to make.

"It's about the wedding present I have for you," he said. "I thought—that is, I—wal, I calculated it would be a nice surprise. I have four children at home to call you mother."

Mrs. Tracy nodded her head approvingly.

"'Twill be more companionable for the little Joneses," she said.

"The Joneses!" gasped Danny. "And who are they?"

"Theres six of them, Danny, dear," said his new wife. "They're my wedding present to you."

Despairing Lover—Hilda, have you nothing to say in answer to the letter I wrote to you last Thursday?

The Heiress—I have not looked at it yet, Algernon. Next Monday is my day for opening sealed proposals.

Tourist in Highlands (who has eaten about four-penny-worth)—What do I owe you for this meal?

Guidwife—Aweel, it's the Sawbath. So we'll no chaarge ye onything.

Grannie—Na, na, we wunna chaarge ye onything. But ye can just gie the bairns saxpence apiece!

In order that the young man may know what is coming to him when he asks a girl to marry him, we quote the following sentences from a popular novel:

"She put her flower-like face to mine.

"My first thought of you and my last are the same, beloved," she answered, "and the thought is this—that you have a heart for whose belated waking queens might keep vigil."

Does a man, in addition to the contract to buy a woman's clothes and groceries for the rest of her life, have to stand for something like this?

HOW IT ENDED

By John Sherman.

For many generations there had been a feud between the Maynards and the Huntleys, descending from father to son and waging with bitter fury.

In the beginning there had been a dispute as to the boundary line between the farms of old Jasper Maynard and Captain Joel Huntley, each claiming ten or twelve more feet of land than the other.

Instead of compromising the case, as they might have done, and dividing the disputed strip of land, each wanted the whole of it, and constant quarrels resulted.

Once the Maynards gathered in the night and moved the boundary fence to the point at which they said it ought to stand, and threatening vengeance dire upon the Huntleys if they dared to move it.

The Huntleys were furious, and swore that they would sue the Maynards for trespass in the first place and move the fence in the next.

The Maynards kept watch over it by day and by night, however, and whenever the Huntleys appeared they were threatened with punishment if they dared to change the position of a single stick or stone.

One day the Maynard house was discovered to be on fire and every effort was made to save it, the force defending the line being called off in the emergency.

The house was saved, but when the Maynards returned to the line they found that a stone wall had been hastily thrown up on the line claimed by the Huntleys, the fence having been pulled down.

The wall was allowed to remain and was made stronger during the night, the Huntleys guarding it with shotguns, pickaxes and other primitive weapons.

Then old Maynard declared that Captain Huntley had set fire to his house and sued him in the courts, the suit lasting many months, and at last when it came to trial, resulting in a disagreement.

In the meantime one of the Maynard boys had set upon and most unmercifully beaten young Joe Huntley, and the captain brought a counter suit for assault, young Maynard being fined twenty dollars and the costs of the suit.

This enraged old Jasper Maynard so much that he renewed his suit against Huntley, and finally got a judgment against him for trespass, in building the wall before the question of the boundary line had been settled.

Huntley appealed, and the case dragged along for years, costing more money than the land in dispute was worth.

Finally Maynard put up a wall on what he called his line, and thus there was a lane between the two farms, and that might have settled the trouble if both disputants had not been so hot-headed.

Both Jasper Maynard and Captain Huntley died before the affair was settled, but their sons took up the quarrel, and the war waged as bitterly as ever.

The law suits continued, now for one cause and now for another, and when three generations of Maynards and Huntleys had passed away, the feud was as bitter as ever.

George Maynard, great grandson of old Jasper Maynard, was now the chief selectman of the town. Clarence Huntley, the present head of the family and the owner of a fine trading ship, being the leader of the opposite party in politics.

An election came, Maynard was defeated, Huntley was elected, and the old, old question of changing the boundary line again came up.

Huntley, being in power, put up a notice at either end of the lane, warning off all trespassers, but suddenly the notices were torn down, the Maynards being accused of the offense.

Then a strong post with a painted sign nailed to it was put in place of the former notices, but this was pulled up and, it was said, helped to keep the Maynard fires going.

Another election came round and Maynard was victorious, Captain Huntley being defeated by a heavy vote, whereat the Maynard faction again rejoiced.

Neither Maynard nor Huntley ever spoke to one another, and their children were sworn enemies, going to different schools and having their own companions, so that the feud threatened to extend all over the town and county.

Captain Clarence Huntley did a good coasting trade, the town where he lived having grown into a seaport of no mean importance.

Colonel Maynard could not brook the success of his rival, and so he set about agitating the question of building a railroad which would kill the coasting trade, as the various commodities the town needed could be brought to it so much quicker and cheaper.

The railroad was built, and the coasting trade suffered in consequence, Huntley being a considerable loser, as he now had to seek further for freights, and making longer voyages, ran more risk than formerly.

He was not the only sufferer, of course, but Maynard chuckled over his losses, and vowed that he would ruin his ancient enemy yet.

Charlie Maynard, the eldest son of the colonel, a young man of about twenty, was attending college in a distant city, and only heard at intervals of the progress of the feud, which he long had deprecated, and tried, in a quiet way, to stop.

One evening being invited to meet a few friends at the house of a lady whom he greatly esteemed, he was introduced to a charming young lady whose name he did not at first catch.

After dancing with her several times he led her to a seat in a quiet spot and said:

"You are not a resident of the city, Miss Hunt, are you?"

"No, Mr. Maynard; but my name is Huntley, not Hunt. I would not have taken the trouble to correct your mistake, but we shall probably meet again, and——"

But here she blushed and stopped.

"Huntley?" said young Maynard. "Why, that name is familiar enough. An unhappy difference between our family and a family of that——"

"I am the daughter of Captain Huntley, with whom your father has——"

"Say no more, Miss Huntley," cried Charlie, warmly. "The subject must be an unpleasant one. Let me disclaim at once and forever any sympathy with my father's foolish and headstrong course. I have never, willingly, taken any part in this quarrel, and I never shall. It is not only foolish, but wicked, and the governor ought to have seen it years ago."

"I am afraid our family has not always been in the right, Mr. Maynard," replied the young lady.

"They have been oftener right than we have, I dare say," responded Charlie, impulsively. "This last move of dad's was outrageous. I just hope that railroad will go to smash. It isn't needed any more than a canal across the ocean."

"You are unlike the rest of us, Mr. Maynard, for they don't seem to be able to live unless this quarrel——"

"Excuse me, Miss——by the way, what is your first name? Mine is Charlie, and if you and I are going to stop this quarrel we ought to get better acquainted, I think."

"I am called Grace," said the other, blushing. "Didn't you know it? I knew your name."

"That's because I have been away so much, and I scarcely know any one at home nowadays. I wouldn't stay there and help carry on this insane fight. Will you call me Charlie and let me call you Grace and do our best, we two, to make peace between the families?"

"I certainly wish it might exist," she answered, and from that moment there was an understanding between the two young persons, at which their respective parents would doubtless have been very angry, had they known of it.

Spring came and passed, and at last Grace told Charlie that her father had sent for her, and that she must leave her friends and return home.

"I'll go with you," he said, quickly. "I can easily cut college for a few days. I can make up the time afterwards."

"No, no, you must not," cried Grace. "I can go alone, and you must not neglect your duties."

"You do not wish me to——"

"No, no, it is not that. I would like to have your company, but——"

"You are afraid of your father's anger?"

"Not as far as I am concerned," she answered, blushing.

"Then you need not fear for me, for I will brave it," said Charlie, eagerly.

"No, you must stay," she pleaded. "You can see me again in the summer."

"Indeed I will," he answered, as he kissed her cheek. "We have a hard fight before us, little one, but we will not shrink before it."

Then they parted and Charlie counted the days which followed, and wished each day that the term was over.

The elder Maynard was very much surprised, when the college vacation was near at hand, to learn that his son proposed spending it at home, a thing he had not done for two years.

When Charlie did come home there was disappointment all around.

In the first place the young fellow learned that Grace had gone off on a voyage with her father, and was not expected back for some months, though where she had gone no one knew.

Then Charlie refused to enter into anything that would tend to injure the Huntleys, and that was a sad blow to Maynard, who had built so much on his son's co-operation.

"Why, they have done nothing but injure us for the last hundred years!" cried Maynard, angrily.

"I can't help that. Two wrongs never made a right, and if the fight goes on it will not be with my assistance. You are a member of the church, and so is Huntley, and yet you fight and scheme and conspire like a couple of pirates. I'm ashamed of you."

Maynard bade his son angrily never to darken his doors again, and Charlie, having no mother to advise or console him, replied that there was no danger, for he was going, never to return till his father and Captain Huntley were friends.

He had some money of his own, and with this he went away to the city to try and earn a living in one way or another.

A year passed with varying fortunes to the young fellow; who was sometimes elated at the prospect of success and then despondent at the thought of failure.

He began now to long to see Grace once more, and at last he resolved to return home, not to his father's house, but to the town, in the hope that he might hear news of her.

He would not patronize the railroad which his father had caused to be built, but took a stage coach from the terminus, reaching town in the evening.

It was a wild, stormy night, and old sailors shook their heads, predicting disaster to the vessels then at sea or on the coast.

Charlie sat in the general room of the village tavern, unnoticed and unknown by the crowd of loungers, who smoked, drank and made merry, while without the storm increased in violence.

It was growing late, the wind howled furiously about the eaves, the rain dashed pitilessly against the windows and most of the men had gone home, when suddenly there came a booming sound above the noise of the tempest, and then an awful cry as of a soul in distress.

Filled with an indefinable terror, Charlie sprang up, rushed bareheaded from the house and hurried to the shore, distant only a few hundred yards.

He could hear the roar of the surf upon the rocks, feel the salt spray in his face, hear the cries of agony, and then, in the fierce light of the electric flash, saw a stout ship driven upon the rocks.

The waves rushed in seething billows high upon the rocks, the rain descended in blinding torrents, and the wind shrieked as though exulting over some awful disaster.

Then came another crash and a wail of agony, and in the glare of the lightning it was seen that the vessel had struck.

Then came that booming sound again, and a streak of fire ascended to the heavens.

They were firing rockets from the ship.

"A boat, a boat!" cried the young fellow. "Who will go with me to the ship?"

"It would not live in such a sea," cried a number of old sailors, who had been attracted to the spot.

"They are throwing a line!" arose a sudden cry. "Make fast, and we may yet save them!"

That was the meaning of the rockets, then.

A line had been thrown ashore, and this, being hauled in, drew after it a stout hawser which was made fast to a flag-staff on shore.

"Will no one go with me?" cried Charlie again, but there was no answer.

"I will carry a line if any one will go with me," he cried again, picking up a stout line which some one had brought and secured it about his waist.

"Have you another hawser?"

"Ay—ay, but you can never reach the ship."

"Give it to me. Ah, that's it; now make fast. If no one will go with me I will make the journey alone."

Then he plunged boldly into the sea, disappeared from sight and swam boldly toward the ship.

Wave after wave dashed upon him, but he dove beneath them and buffeted the billows with sturdy strokes till at last he rose right under the ship's bows, and called for a line.

It was thrown him, and he was hauled on board, tired but by no means exhausted.

The line he had brought was drawn in and at last a stout hawser was taken on deck and made fast.

"First save the women," cried the brave young man, "and then the men can save themselves."

At that moment there was a glad cry, and a young girl rushed up to Charlie, threw herself upon his breast, and exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! You are still true to me—you have come to save my life."

"Grace, my own, my darling, do I meet you once more? Do I indeed hold you in my arms? This is joy indeed!"

"Save the others first," she whispered, clinging to him.

The women were placed in slings secured to the hawsers, and then sent ashore, one after another, loud shouts greeted each successful effort.

Suddenly, when all the women but Grace had been saved, a fearful cry arose.

The vessel was going to pieces!

Seizing Grace in his arms, Charlie sprang overboard and began swimming to shore.

The rain beat upon them, frightened birds screamed above their heads, the waters surged madly about them, and for a moment all seemed lost.

Charlie clung despairingly to the lines, summoned up all his strength and made one more effort.

The vessel was still safe, though fast on the rocks, and that awful cry had been a false alarm.

In a few more minutes Charlie and Grace were drawn from the waters and stood safe upon shore.

The vessel was Captain Huntley's, but the captain himself had died during the voyage, leaving the ship to the care of the first officer, who was not used to this ragged coast.

Most of the crew were saved, but the vessel itself was a total wreck, and the Huntleys were well night ruined.

Charlie heard more news the next day, and this was that the secretary of the railroad company had fled, taking with him all the available funds, and that the road was on the verge of bankruptcy.

The shock had so affected Mr. Maynard that he became insane and, in a fit of despair, took his own life.

"Oh, this wicked quarrel," muttered Charlie. "How much evil might have been avoided had it been ended years ago. Let us put a stop to it, Grace, dearest, and may our families be as firm friends as they have before been bitter enemies."

Both the Maynards and the Huntleys were impoverished by this last stroke, and they welcomed anything that would free them from their troubles.

When Charlie and Grace were married, which soon happened, the long feud was ended, and now the lane is used by both families alike and only good will and affection can be found where once all was strife and hatred, and that is how IT ENDED.

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